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FANDOM'S FORUM

LOC

An Interview with MIKE BARON writer of NEXUS

GREEN LANTERN

First of a multi-part series

KURT OLSSON
"THE KING AND I"
A look back at Jack Kirby's 1970's Marvel Work

FANDOM'S SHOWCASE

FICTION
by Dwight Decker

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Fandom's Forum

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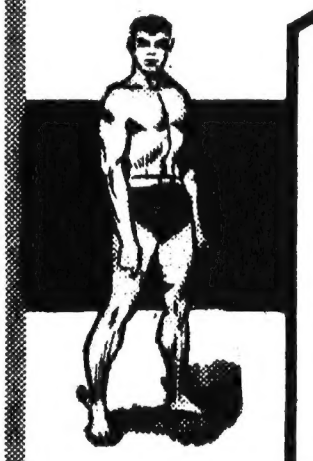

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ELFQUEST III PORTFOLIO
by Wendy Pini

The Eflquest portfolios by Wendy Pini have proved themselves among the most popular ever published. Both *Elfquest I* and *Elfquest II* are long out of print and are commanding top collector's prices. Schanes & Schanes is pleased to announce the third release in this fabulous series: *Elfquest III*.

Elfquest III will be released in two editions. The regular edition will feature twelve delightful color plates, each 9¼" × 12¼", a full-figure portrait of one of the principal members of the Wolfriders tribe—the hardy characters that populate the Elfquest saga. These portraits originally appeared as the back covers to *Elfquest Comics* #1 through #12. They are now reproduced on heavy coated art stock, ready for display. In addition, Ms. Pini has created a stunning new full-color piece of art for the cover of the presentation folder that holds the plates. The interior plates are reproduced in color on the back cover. We have commissioned a special Mylar "snug" for this edition, to protect the portfolio and enhance the cover. This high-quality production, *Elfquest III* regular edition (unsigned), sells for only $12.00.

There will also be a deluxe signed and numbered limited edition for collectors. This portfolio contains two additional color plates, *never before published*, along with the other twelve. The cover will repeat the artwork of the regular edition, but will be specially foil-stamped for a more impressive presentation. This edition will be limited to only 3,000 copies, each hand-signed by Wendy Pini. The Mylar "snug" is included. Price of the deluxe edition is $25.00. Publication date is June, 1982.

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to ***LOC*** in transit. The magazine that is an experiment in publishing has journeyed south. Due to a combination of events, the ***NMP*** production office has joined the business office at a new address, in Florida. The move was necessary, and hopefully it will prove to be beneficial.

LOC was designed as an avenue of communication. An avenue through which the comics reader could express ideas, opinions, criticism, or whatever to, and with fandom in general. This impetus was something that Franzines had drifted away from, over the years. ***LOC***, the publishing experiment, was an attempt, in the words of Carol Kalish (its first Editorial writer)" . . . to fill the void and resuscitate the earlier approach of the original Fanzines." The experiment was successful.

The talent and hard work of such people as Carol Kalish, Richard Howell, and Bob Soron gave the magazine life; gave it direction, and carried it through its infancy. The response of you the reader/contributor gave the magazine success. ***LOC*** was and is a team effort, and you, the reader are a part of that team.

Unfortunately no team is immune to change — any ***AVENGERS*** fan can tell you about that. And, as most of you know by now, the ***NMP*** *line of magazines has recently experienced CHANGE. This change was in the area of personnel. Carol Kalish accepted a job offer from* ***MARVEL COMICS*** and within the month of her employment at ***MARVEL***, became head of the Direct Sales Department. Richard Howell is now the editor of NMP's graphic magazine line. He will be over-seeing ***ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATED, FANTASY ILLUSTRATED,*** and ***RISING STAR.*** Bob Soron, after a much deserved vacation, heads for new fields. I wish all three of them continued success, and express to them — from everyone at ***NMP*** — our gratitude and admiration for a job well done. I hope that when busy schedules permit, they will drop us a line — and if an article or two happens to be attached to that line, you'll hear no complaints from me.

Now ***LOC*** moves into a new stage. Can this magazine survive its relocation to Florida? Will the new staff be able to continue the same quality that was hallmarked by Howell, Kalish, and Soron? I believe that ***LOC's*** new editorial team WILL be able to reach and maintain the level of quality that the magazine has previously enjoyed. And, in time, even improve on that quality. But we are only half of the LOC team. YOU are the other half of that team.
YOU the reader.
YOU the comic fan.
YOU the CONTRIBUTOR.
Not only by paying your hard earned money to purchase this magazine, but also be getting involved and communicating will ***LOC*** survive.
Remember the blurb over the ***LOC*** title on the contents page? It reads "FANDOM'S FORUM". That's YOU.

ROBERT LEWIS
EDITOR

Notes from the publisher

LOC is entering a new phase of its existence with this issue. After one year at publication, LOC will now be passed onto the hands of its third editorial regime. First there was Carol Kalish and Richard Howell who launched the title and helped the magazine through its first tentative steps towards developing an identity. Then came Bob Soron, first trained under Richard and Carol, and then the Editor in his own right. Bob began to map plans to improve the magazine and helped to bring new blood into the fold. Now, the magazine will pass into the hands of Robert Lewis, who will also be editing LOC's sister publication COMICS FEATURE as well as acting as Production Manager for the entire NMP line of commentary magazines. Robert brings a long interest in comics and a strong knowledge of production techniques to the helm. Together with myself, as Publisher, he will be planning the future of LOC and will be taking steps to make LOC still more interesting. The major thrust which will concern Robert and myself in developing the direction for the magazine will be ways in which to involve you, the reader of LOC, in the magazine so that the magazine can truly be **Fandom's Forum.** We will also continue those aspects of LOC, especially its letters section — which unfortunately due to confusion during the transition will be somewhat short — and articles presenting the most interesting thoughts on comics of its regular staff of writers.

What changes can be expected from the new editor? Well, those will begin to be apparent this issue and will become more so as the transformation becomes complete with the next issue of LOC. As you can see, the familiar aspects of the magazine, humorous strips by Tom Linehan and Mark Mardersorian, columns of opinion by Paul Balze, Lou Mougin, Margaret O'Connell and others, and resuming next issue, a large letters section, remain. But added to their ranks you will find several new sections: Fandom Forum, Fandom Showcase on Art, Fandom Showcase on Fiction, and Fandom Spotlight. You will also find a meaty article devoted to a major Marvel character or creator and a major article devoted to some aspect of DC, either a piece about a character, a book, a writer or an artist.

What are the new sections? **Fandom Forum** will be a forum for the type of discussion which used to make fanzines so lively. Older fans will remember the type of article and younger fans will be pleasantly surprised. This section will present a type of material lost to fandom for many years. Such questions as "Are Marvel characters inherently inferior to DC characters?," "Is Superman the most powerful superhero of all?" will be asked by one of our writers and then responded to by you, the readers of LOC. The most interesting responses will be published and the reader submitting the piece will be rewarded with a $15 prize. Two or three such responses will be printed on each topic. Other responses will be run in the letters section and while no prize money will be paid everyone will still be able to see your opinion.

Fandom Showcase on Art will devote ten pages each issue to printing submissions form LOC readers. The submissions should be pieces of art devoted to superheroes, villains, monsters, funny animals, scenes of horror and other aspects of the comics world. We will not only print the most professional pieces but also those which illustrate the various stages of artistic development or which are simply interesting to look at. Please do not think that you have to be a fully developed Frank Miller or Neal Adams to participate in this section. In fact we would not print a submission (not that one would be forthcoming) from such gentlemen as there are many other places for their work to appear. **Fandom Showcase on Fiction** is the other side of the creative coin and will present works of fan fiction by LOC readers. As with the art section, many different types of work will be presented and it will not be necessary to be an Ernest Hemingway to see print. However, it will be necessary to produce a high level of excitement and to maintain a competent level of storytelling and grammar. Finally, the last section is a revival of what had previously been an occasional section of the magazine, **Fandom Spotlight.** It will begin to appear every issue.

Fandom Spotlight will present an interview with one of the people who are creating the alternative press. The writers, artists and publishers involved with such publications as **NEXUS, JUSTICE MACHINE, CEREBUS** and **WEIRDO** are creating an entire cosmos of good material outside of the normal restricting **Marvel** and **DC** universes. We will talk with these people and learn what types of skills and what visions they bring to the creative process. We will also inquire into the ways in which a budding writer or artist goes about getting their work published or beginning their own publishing company and achieving the necessary distribution and production to be successful.

It is our sincerest hope that the new sections will help LOC to achieve its original goal, serving you the reader in creating a forum for your work and ideas — in becoming **LOC, Fandom's Forum.**

HAL SCHUSTER

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NOW... THE FUN BEGINS!

Fandom's Forum

This section may very well be the most exciting new section in LOC. It is an open invitation to you, the reader, to immediately become involved in the magazine. It is also a return to the type of material which made some of the fanzines of the '60s the lively places they were. Each issue a writer will present a very controversial piece, one designed to create disagreement among those who read it. Proposals such as those that follow will be put forth: "Why **DC** characters are better than **Marvel** characters," "**Superman** is the most powerful character in comics" and other highly disagreeable material. We will then invite all of our readers to write in response whether favoring or disagreeing with the position taken. The best pieces will be run in LOC and the writer will be paid $15 for first printing rights to the piece. Shorter responses will be printed within the letters section and will not be paid for, but will still be read by all of LOC's readers.

FANDOM'S FORUM

MURRAY WARD'S "Four-Color Words" More LAST STORIES

This month's installment of "**FOUR-COLOR WORDS**" is the promised sequel to **LOC #2**'s column, in which I requested my readers' thoughts on the topic of "**THE LAST [FILL IN NAME OF COMICS CHARACTER] STORY**"—in other words, your suggestions as to probably scenarios for the final adventure of any particular super-hero. so far I have two interesting letters on the topic to share with the rest of you [I'm sure there will be more in the future, including responses to these responses], and together with some additional thoughts of my own on the subject of the disappearance and/or demise of heroes and villains, they make up this article.

The first letter is from John Burt, of San Diego, California, where he is a student at Balboa Hospital, and he begins by jogging my memory on an already-published **" LAST STORY,"** before proceeding with his own speculations:

"I was amazed by your 'last story' idea; this is the most fun I've had since I started writing to **WHAT IF?**. Why, though, didn't you mention the third 'end of Superman' story in, I think **SUPERMAN #235** [my library is back in Oregon], **"THE DEATH OF SUPERMAN"** [?], in which Kal-El was fated to die hauling an experimental reactor away from Earth. For me, that is the end of Superman. Supergirl and Green Lantern arrive, offering their assistance, but he sends them away, even though with GL accompanying him, he might have been able to survive, shielded by the ring. He goes alone, hauling the deadly structure away into space, vanishing save for a glowing point that flares up suddenly annihilating the now-invisible figure of the Man of Steel. Curtain.

"Superman is a mythic figure, literally; he is the Hero-Redeemer who must, in the end, save humanity by taking the rap for them, like christ, Arthur, and all the suicide heroes of history. It is only this lack of a glorious death that keeps Superman from becoming a wholly mythic creature, and in my sometime project, the rock opera **STARCHILD**, he gains precisely that through his final sacrifice.

"Most of the other big-name super-heroes are **not** mythic figures, and so it is harder to wrap them up. The end of The Atom, say, is simply an ending, a stopping place. He starts to go gray and slips his costume to Snapper Carr of someone, or is torn in half by a .38 slug and is avenged by Hawkman. Green Lantern's death is almost businesslike: 'No use fooling yourself, Hal Jordan, you're dying. Now you must find a replacement, as you were chosen...'

"The only one that really catches my interest beyond the ones you named in **LOC #2** is the end of The Fantastic Four. One day the group will have to close up for good, honst, no kidding this time.

" 'Sue, my injury in New Mexico has been the last straw. I've had it, I've decided to retire.'

'Reed, how can you—'

'Damn it, I'm well past sixty, I can't go on like this forever! My flesh is like living elastic, but it's still drying out and stiffening. I've spoken with Ben and he's finally agreed to quit as well. He's almost as old, and even The Thing's heart weaken with time. In some ways, he's in worse shape than I am. It's only reasonable to give up, go back to research full-time. We'll take a couple of weeks with Tom Starr in Jamaica, and then—"

'Reed, dammit, if you're serious about this, you can quit if you please, but you'll remember that I'm a good twenty years younger than you. I hit menopause a year ago and since then my powers have been growing. You've tested me; I'm more powerful now than ever before. How the hell can you ask me to retire when I'm at my peak?

"Eventually, Reed and Sue are divorced. Mr. Fantastic and the Thing become two eccentric research scientists at a Roxxon complex in California. The Baxter Building's contents are sold off. Sue, Johnny, and Franklin join the Avengers. The Fantastic Four are gone utterly, and their remains nothing of the group's cohesion and organization. One day, showing off for the boys at the facility, Ben Grimm suffers a massive coronary. This marks the end of any hope that the original group could be reunited. The Fantastic Four will henceforth be conceded to be only a memory, a part of history.

"That's fun, but it's not legendary. Captain America and the Red Skull dying together, that's legend. The X-Men and Magneto going down together against the Sentinels. The Silver Surfer slappng Galactus's face. Hawkeye bleeding to death after Deathbird does something indelicate with his bow."

Murray here, again. One reason I decided to reproduce these letters in full is that I always felt the readers were being cheated when they wrote in to Murray Boltinoff's old DC letter columns and were paraphrased into obscurity. Another reason should be obvious from reading John Burt's missive; namely, how do you paraphrase something like that?

While I must confess to having no memory of the Superman story of which John reminisces [and finding it, at least in the retelling, full of holes—why didn't Supes simply throw the reactor into space, as he does with the bomb-filled lift in **SUPERMAN II**?], I agree with his analysis of Superman-as-myth-figure. Actually, one might interpret the aforementioned **SUPERMAN II** as a Christ-analogy, in the Kal-El dies [losing his powers is roughly the same thing, in that there is no more Superman] as an act of love, but is reborn again to save humanity. [For those whose only familiarity with the Christian mythos comes from viewing **JESUS CHRIST, SUPERSTAR** and **GODSPELL**, I should point out that Jesus resurrects himself from the dead in the "sequel."] Thus, even without the presence of Marlon Brando, the second movie completes [perhaps without deliberate intent on the part of the producers] the New Testament parallelism that was so evident [heavy-handed, some would say] in the first film.

And also, that John's version of the FF break-up strikes a special chord in that it parallels the story of that **other** Fabulous Foursome born in the 1960s with whom the FF were often compared, namely the Beatles? Think about it: the group greaks up and the members go their separate ways, but even years later there is a faint hope of a reunion, until a pivotal member passes on unexpectedly. Further proof that, certain 1970s titles to the contrary, the world of the comics is essentially a nicer place to live than the real world. There, a heart attack in old age; here, a bullet from a madman. Comments, anyone?

The second letter comes from Howard Leroy Davis, of Pitman, N.J., and does a **"WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...?"** number by bringing back some already-cancelled characters, only to let us know what they might have been up to all these years, thus writing a last story which is not really a last story, to wit:

"Years ago, before **BLACKHAWK** was cancelled the first time, I realized that my favorite series was in trouble.

"I wrote to the editors, Kubert and Giordano, proposing a **'LAST STORY.'** Well, not really so. Actually the idea was a series of issues...10 plus-or-minus...which would bring profound changs to the group and have them emerge as something new.

"This is moe of less the way it went:

"1] All of the Blackhawks are captured except Hendrickson. To save them he must hit a distant

target with a rifle—piece of cake. [He's the markman of the group, remember?] He tries twice and fails. On the third try something jostles his aim and he succeeds. Despite praise of the others, he knows that he, the oldest Blackhawk, is over the hill. He retires to run his gun shop.

"2] Functioning as electronics expert, Chuck challenges a runaway computer [a la **COLOSSUS,—THE FORBIN PROJECT**]. He wins but forfeits his life.

"3] Down two in strength, the Blackhawks are nearly defeated by a meance. They decide to look for new members.

"4] New members are tried out. Lady Blackhawk wins a place on the roster, as does a male. The man proves to be a treacherous spy who seeks to steal Blackhawk weaponry secrets for sale to a foreign power. [Probably Red China, at that time.]

"5] Again at reduced strength, the Blackhawks go through self-examination. What is their role in the world to be? Stanislaus, whose intelligence has been dimmed by too many concussions over the yeras, returns to Poland, finds a simple personal adventure and realizes that his place is with his people and the land. He retires to farm and be a Polish peasant leader.

"6] The challenge: A crew is needed for a Grand Tour Space Voyage. Within the Space Training Center, an isolated rock sample spawns an uncontainable plague [shades of **THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN**!]. The Blackhawks defeat it, but in the process the microbe, which attacks males only, kills or incapacitates all male astronauts.

"7] To implement/crew the Grand Tour Space Voyage, the Blackhawks volunteer. The four males, Blackhawk, Andre, Chop Chop and Olaf are accepted. Lady Blackhawk is granted a change to compete with the six trained female astronauts for the four remaining positions on the crew. She wins but with great difficulty.

"8] The crew of four males and four females appears balanced and harmonious, but not so. One of the accepted females plots with one of the rejected females to get rid of one of the Blackhawks and get her on the crew. [homosexual motivation? Couldn't do that in 1968; maybe you could today.] The plot foiled, both are expelled from the program. The lone back-up female becomes part of the crew.

"9] With no back-up crew, the launch date approaches. A foreign power seeks to delay the launch by disabling one or more of the crew. The Blackhawks foil the plot.

'10] Launch: From here on it's **STAR TREK** [I wrote this in 1968-69, remember?] with personal relationships of four males/four females overlaying SF plots."

Murray again. Comics history has rendered moot the question of adopting Howard's gradual changeover to space opera for the Blackhawk team. Curiously enough, they did go through changes, not quite so gradual, towards the end of their run in the 1960s first becoming "camp" costumed super-heroes, then reverting to their original uniformed identities briefly before biting the dust. During their 1970s resurrection, chance or coincidence seems to have resulted in the use of some plot elements very similar to Howard's: the gradual phasing-out of Hendy due to old age; the death of Chuck; a change in basic **raison d'etre** for the group, etc.

One can only wonder if Howard's SF-oriented Blackhawks would have survived better than the versions DC tried. His bit-by-bit reorganizaTION of the team [with a change of uniforms, too, I presume, once they shifted into space] reminds me slightly of the latter days of The Challengers of the Unknown before **their** late 1960s cancellation, especially with the introduction of new female characters. I would have applauded the latter element, although it meant doing away with the long-standing membership roster, since it always bugged me that the various comic-book hero-teams patterned on Doc Savage and his Amazing Five of the pulps never failed to reverse Lester Dent's romantic formula. In the Savage books, his followers regularly pursued the ladies [Monk and Ham in particular were regular wolves], while Doc held himself aloof; in the comics, the leader might begrudgingly be given a girlfriend [Lady Blackhawk fo r Blackhawk, June Robbins for the Challs' Ace], but aside form Casanova Andre, the rest of the team behaved like monks.

As for the switch from flying adventurers to galaxy-hopping explorers, I suppose it would be a natural progression. The Blackhawks were only one

of a great many "airplane" strips in the 1940s, when flight and airborn combat were still fresh and exciting concepts, but lost a lot of their audience when space flight made the escapades of seven guys in airplanes seem like something from Grandpa's old diary. [I hypothesize that had he not been made a member of The Fantastic Four team, the same fate would have befallen the reborn Human Torch. Fire is hardly an exciting power in a world in which nuclear weaponry is part of everyday reality.] Since a long-held dictum of comics is that science fiction doesn't sell, however, one wonders whether even a similartiy to **STAR TREK**, in a time when **STAR TREK** was still on the air in new episodes, would have saved Blackhawk and Co. It's a very intersting idea, but it brings to mind two examples from more recent comics, neither of which is too encouraging: 1] The new team sounds a lot like David Michelinie's late DC strip, Star Hunters, cancelled in the DC Implosion of 1978, and 2] Picturing our old flying buddies shouting "Hawk-a-a-a" to each other via radio in airless space smacks of **what if? #14**'s **"What If Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos fought World War II in Outer Space?"**

If I get enough additional response to the initial "**Last Story**" column and this one, I hope to devote a future installment to still more of my readers' entertaining speculations. For now, though, a few personal thoughts.

While we have been cogitating on the possible deaths of those comics characters still extant, the comics publishers have seen fit, now and again, to actually finish off a character or strip they felt had outlived its/his/her usefulness. As with the rampant heroine-killings of the last few years [discussed in **COMICS FEATURE #6**,] I question the validity and the amount of forethought [and especially **after**thought] put into these "last stories." For example:

Next to female counterparts and girlfriends, kid sidekicks have been the most likely candidates for an early grave in comics. After the pattern for their disposal was set with the death of Bucky, Captain America's boy partner, in **AVENGERS #1**, no junior edition of an adult crimefighter this side of Robin was really safe [witness the kids seeking safety in numbers by forming a new team of Teen Titans every few years]. And next to the trend of doing away with sidekicks, the most copies facet of **AVENGERS #4** was the **manner** of Bucky's demise. So it was that when the original Torch's adolescent edition, Toro, was brought back in **SUB-MARINER #14**, he too was killed...and in exactly the same way as Bucky. This gambit proved so popular [with the writers, if not with the fans] that, like the death of Jarella, which was a panel-for-panel rerun of the death of Capt. Stacy, it was recycled for use by nonessential personnel other than ex-kid sidekicks. In **X-MEN #95**, Thunderbird perished...guess how he bought it?

To this point, my only complaint with these stories is their sheer repetitiveness, and given that they were published in 1964, 1969, and 1975, respectively, and a new crop of comics readers is expected to rear its collective head every five or six years, perhaps the scripters can be forgiven by resuscitating a good dramatic scene. But the aftermath of these stories is my main bond of contention. For while heroes traditionally stay decently dead once killed off [unless they come back as somebody else, or unless their long-lost brothers assume their costumed identities to avenge them,] comics villains ever since The Red Skull and The Joker stories of the early 1940s have shown an indefatigible tendency to escape fatality in their scrapes with the Grim Reaper, and return to bedevil the heroes another day. Given the shortage of really classy villains, this is fine and good...as long as the villain's crime is to rob banks, take over governments, menace helpless heroines and innocent bystanders, and do away with nameless supporting cast members. But when a villain kills the hero's lady friend, or the hero's sidekick, or the earmarked-for-limbo hero himself, he must be punished, totally and irrevocably, without hope of parole. In real life, life imprisonment would suffice for such a crime, but in comics, sending a super-villain to jail is like sending him to the country for a rest cure. Comic villains only stay incarcerated until such time as they have hatched a new plot to undo the hero; then they escape the hoosegow with laughable ease. No, when the villain wipes out a major character, he too must die! And so he does...except...you see, there are these writer with very poor memories...

After a series of epic battles between The Avengers and their opposite numbers, The Masters of Evil, Captain America finally caught up with Dr./Baron [Stan forgot which, so maybe he was both, like Robert Bruce Banner] Zemo, and in **AVENGERS #15**, a mere 11 issues after the revelation of Bucky's death, his murder was avenged by his star-spangled mentor. Bucky, you will recall, had been blown to kingdom come aboard a bomb-laden drone plane remotely piloted by Zemo, which the Boy Marvel had been attempting to stop. Later villains didn't have Zemo's smarts, it seems, and sat behind the joysticks of the boobytrapped aircraft in person, so that **they** got sent to the Happy Hunting Ground for Costumed Super-People along with their victims. The Mad Thinker's plane blew up, taking him and Toro with it; Count Nefaria's escape craft exploded, and he and Thunderbird were supposedly no more.

Except that they **came back**, just like all those villains who never dreamed of actually killing a super-hero. Toro and T-Bird are still deceased, as far as anyone can be certain, after 12 years and 6 years respectively, but Count Nefaria managed to teleport himself out of range of the blast [only to meet a later, hopefully more permanent fate, in the pages of **IRON MAN**—though not until he had waltzed around with The Avengers a few times first], and The Thinker showed up for several rematches with various Marvel heroes without a word of explanation ["Exploding plane? **What** exploding plane? **I** don't remember any exploding plane..."] Obviously there are no continuity freaks working for the Comics Code Authoritty, which guarantees that villains shall receive their just, non-refundable, non-transferrable, non-negotiable desserts for their misdeeds in the four-color pages.

More recently, the creative personnel of comics have [dare I say it?] come up with something **original** in the way of maneuvering unwanted characters off-stage permanently [or until they figure out what to do with them]. At the risk of dating myself, I have christened this method "Whoopee Death." That is, the character to be done away with is given a lover/companion opf the opposite sex, who is him/herself either an entirely new one-shot character or a second character who is being gotten rid of, and the two of them disappear into space, or time, or a convenient interdimensional warp, and in the words of Ben Grimm in **FF #54**, they "go off somewhere and schmooze," or as Ben **might** have said, they go off and make whoopee. Forever. Or until some other writer finds a use for them.

Talk about going to your reward!!

So far, we have seen Ms. Marvel quit The Avengers to make it with Marcus in the infamous **AVENGERS #200**, Thundra leave Marvel-Earth behind in the company of the macho Hyperion in **MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #67** [notice that these are both deliberately-designed-as-agressive-feminist characters we're talking about here], and the septuagenarian Blue Diamond [don't ask me how he got so old, when his WW ii peers are all still in their late 50s at most] elope, sort of, with the

alien Star-Dancer in **MTIO #79** [**strange** book, that **TWO-IN-ONE**]. I suspect these various wordsmiths got their unconscious inspiration from Steve Gerber in his **MAN-THING** story of issues #13-14 [1st series]. [Who knows if Beverly Switzler and Dr. Bong would **ever** have returned, had not Gerber been taken off **HOWARD THE DUCK**?]

Bearing all this in mind, I'd like to amend a few rules to those already governing the submission of "Last Story" scenarios to this column. No hero-saves-a-small-child-from-crumbling-masonry-during-a-battle-with-a-super-villain-and-is-crushed-with-one-outstretched-hand-poking-out-of-the-wreckage stories. No hero-tries-to-stop-escaping-plane-which-blows-up stories. And please, no Whoopee Deaths. At least not for the next little while. Like, until I figure out how to become a defunct comic character...

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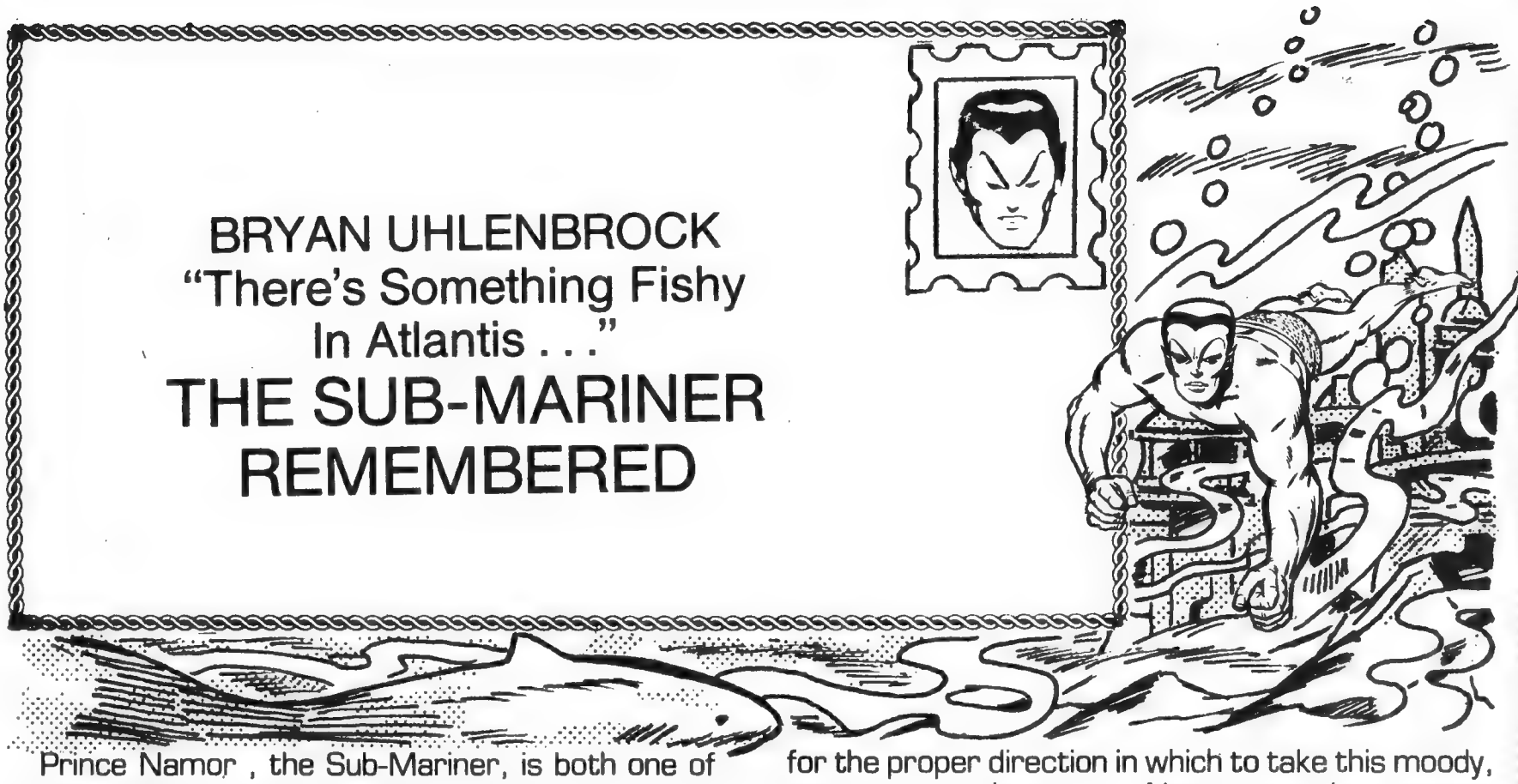

Prince Namor , the Sub-Mariner, is both one of Marvel Comics Group's oldest characters and one of its most internally-consistent entities. None of this suspended-animation double-talk and replacement by two—or is that three?— imposters for him, although that excuse was good enough for Captain America. No android Torch/Vision/modern **Human** Torch mix-up would do justice to regal Prince Namor. He is, now as then, Namor the first and only...Prince of Atlantis, Lord of the Seven Seas, Heir of Neptune, and Scion of Smugness. The years have come and gone, wreaking their inescapable changes on Betty Dean, Namor's first surface-love...but the Sub-Mariner remains as youthful as ever, untouched by the ravages of time, eternal as the sea itself, unchanging and unchangeable.

Don't you believe it.

For there was a time when Stan Lee and Jack Kirby were still in the midst of forming the Marvel Universe. Anth the pages were blank and without substance, and literally **anything** was possible.

And there were mistakes without number, and lo, it was before the time of the No-Prize, so the mistakes stood. There was Bob Banner, and Spiderman was accidentally called **Super**-Man, and there was a fourth Skrull left unaccounted for at the end of **FANTASTIC FOUR #2.** And all the loose ends got tied up eventually, sometimes years later and usually by other, younger writers. And Stan smiled and said it was good, and went to the West Coast in search of a movie deal.

In those early days, when Stan and Jack decided That the Sub-Mariner would make a good hero-villain but needed to have his powers beefed up slightly if he was going to take on the entire Fantastic Four...while they were still fishing around for the proper direction in which to take this moody, tempestuous character...Namor was given powers which he had never displayed in his 1940s and 1950s incarnations, powers which were eventually deemed inappropriate; powers that faded away and were finally forgotten quite without explanation, just as they had appeared without so much as a by-your-leave.

What were these mysterious powers? What was their source, andwhy did they vanish as inexplicably as they ahd appeared?

To answer these questions, we must assemble a number of clues ranging from Namor's reappearance in the Marvel Age, through his **TALES TO ASTONISH** series, and culminating in May 1968's premiere issue of **SUBMARINER**.

The Sub-Mariner's first appearance in the modern Marvel Age occurred in the pages of **FANTASTIC FOUR #4**. Johnny Storm, temporarily miffed at his teammates and hiding out from them in the Bowery, discovered an abnormally-strong derelict whose memory was clouded by amnesia while his features had been hidden by long hair and a beard. Mere moments earlier, Johnny had been reading a Sub-Mariner comic from the 1940s [what was a twenty-year-old comic book doing in a Bowery flop-house, anyway? I don't think **any**body will ever be able to explain that one!], and when he used his flame powers to give the derelict a haircut and a shave... aw, darn it! You guessed!

That's right, the ragged derelict was, in fact, noble Prince Namor, eager to resume his war against the human race once the Torch had restored his memory with a little shock treatment. [**Little**??? The Torch dropped the unidentified amnesiac into the ocean !] Finding Atalantis a

radioactive ruin and its people nowhere in sight, Namor naturally assumed that this disaster was the fault of the Nasty Humans. Vowing he would have his revenge, Namor unearthed an ancient trumpet-horn [which my ancestors buried here a century ago"] and used it to awaken Giganto [the largest living thing in all the world"], an enormous creature which appears to be part whale and part frog. Namor then led the brute to the surface world in what proved to be the opening salvo of his unsuccessful war against humankind. In this same issue, he also threatened to use the horn to "unleash a haorde of sea monsters such as mankind has never **dreamt** of"...and, oh, yes, he met and fell in love with Susan Storm, the Invisible Girl.

There was nothing out of character or beyond Namor's capabilities in this "revival" issue—but the Sub-Mariner's next appearance [**FF #6**] was another amtter entirely. Early in the issue, he was shown frolicing with a school of porpoises. He appears to be controlling them, [though this is Aquaman's forte, rather than the Sub-Mariner's], and even goes so far as to address them as "my subjects." Now, this can be excused as a demonstration of Namor's loneliness... but later in the same isue, when Doctor Doom zaps him with an electric charge, Namor simply absorbs it and returns it to the good Doctor "like an electric eel," in flat-out violation of Namor's abilities as we presently understand them.

YOU ARE WORTHY OF ME, FEMALE! IN EVERY WAY! BUT HERE IS A POWER YOU CANNOT COMBAT! THE RADAR SENSE OF THE CAVE FISH FROM THE LOWEST DEPTHS OF THE SEA!
THEY HAVE NO EYES, BUT CAN SENSE THE PRESENCE OF OTHERS BY USING THEIR RADAR-TYPE INSTINCTS! AS I SHALL DO WITH YOU!

His third appearance, **FF #9**, took matters a step further. "I have the powers of all the creatures who live beneath the sea!" he bragged to Sue Storm, and to prove his point he again used the powers of the electric eel, as well as the "radar sense of the cave fish from the lowest depths of the sea" to nullify Sue's power of invisibility. In **STRANGE TALES #107**, fighting the human Torch, Namor inflated himse½f like a puffer or swellfish, in addition to once more using the powers of an electric eel. Finally, in **STRANGE TALES #125**, he again mimicked the ever-popular electric eel, this time while battling both the Torch and the Thing. "Ye gods and little fishes!" the observant fan might shriek at this point, "doesn't he ever get tired of acting like an eel?"

Evidently, the answer is yes, for in **DAREDEVIL #7**, Namor was unaccountably staggered by electric current. Luckily, the Warlord Krang had taken over Atlantis by the end of that particular issue, giving Namor a chance to depart before anyone bothered to ask what had happened to his electric eel abilities. During the Sub-Mariner's tenure as a roving hero-villain [he also appeared in **AVENGERS #3** and**X-Men #6**, as well as in **FF ★4,27,&33,** briefly conquering New York in **FF ANNUAL #1** to boot], he was shown to have Atlantean science at this command, in addition to "the wealth of the sea" [scavenged from countless shipwrecks], various exotic fish, and the legions of Atlantis [which he rediscovered in **FF ANNUAL #1) at his disposal. He was shown to have a vendetta against the Avengers for no** particular reason [**AVENGERS #3**, although he might have simply been pretending to hate the Avengers in order to get on the Hulk's good side—assuming ol' greenskin **has** a good side], was briefly suspected of being a mutant [**X-MEN # 6**, although Professor X should have known better—Namor is, of course, a hybrid], and was betrayed by Lady Dorma, the love of his life, whom he naturally forgave [FF #33]. He had, it seems, done everything but explain the source of his icthyoidal imitation abilities.

His solo series in **TALES TO ASTONISH #70-102** confused rather than clarified matters. In **ASTONISH #70**, at the beginning of his quest for Neptune's trident, Namor was forced to do battle with a giant killer squid, noting that "though I have dominion over all that swims, yon monster will not bend to my will!" This squid can be said to be following the directions of Neptune himself, however, so even if we must grant Namor the telepathic powers of Aquaman, this does not constitute an outright inconsistency. In **ASTONISH #72**, according to a caption written by Stan himself, Namor does indeed have telepathic powers: "Using his natural command over all who inhabit the watery depths, Namor

YOU FORGET--I HAVE THE POWERS OF ALL THE CREATURES WHO LIVE BENEATH THE SEA! I CAN CHARGE THE VERY AIR WITH ELECTRICITY --USING THE POWER OF THE ELECTRIC EEL!
21
TAKING ONE LAST DESPERATE GAMBLE, DAREDEVIL JOINS THE TWO LIVE WIRES, HOPING TO STAGGER HIS SUPER-HUMAN FOE! AND THEN...
ZZZIST!

obtains a mental message from a passing school of fish." **ASTONISH #73** finally gives a partial explanation for Namor's mysterious extra powers. Weakened by the Diamonds of Doom, Subby reasons, "All that live within this realm are mine to command! Therefore, let the strength of the flora and fauna about me—from the humblest fish to the lowliest seaweed—be mine!" With this added strength, Namor managed to overcome the Demon of the Diamonds. Now, if Sub-Mariner is able to absorb the strength of undersea creatures in this manner, it is only a small step to being able to utilize their various abilities when necessary. Should he be taken by surprise, as in **DAREDEVIL #7**, it is not inconceivable that electric current **would** briefly stun him. We are still left with a few questions, though: why is Namor's body suddenly able to accomodate this wide range of new powers? Where did his mental abilities come from in the first place? This same issue, **ASTONISH #73**, contains the first concrete example pf Namor mentally controlling the actions of aquatic life forms: he is shown mentally summoning a group of electric eels to do his bidding, and also receives a mental message from those eels.

ASTONISH #74 shows the aged Vashti riding a sea-horse, thinking: "These specially-bred sea-horses are among the most sensitive of all underwater creatures! If I continue to concentrate on the Sub-Mariner, my mount will catch my thought, and thus be aware of my destination! Then by catching impulses from all other forms of life we pass he will soon learn where Namor was last seen!" This passage implies that **all** Atlanteans—indeed, all forms of undersea life—possess limited telepathic powers, and Namor should be no exception. In fact, his mental prowess exceeds that of most normal beings, Atlantean and surface-dweller alike: in **ASTONISH #79**, he destroys the Puppet Master's "simul-image" puppet [with which the Puppet Master had been controlling Namor's actions] from miles away by sheer force of will. "My mind must be the equal of my body—instrength!" he proclaims. In**ASTONISH #80**, he again mentally controls a group of electric eels, and in **#89** he vocally controls sharks, octopi, and a giant whale. By **ASTONISH #93**, however, his mental powers seem to have disappeared, and he is apparently unable to control a giant octopus. In **#96** he is attacked by a group of polar serpents and is evidently unable to control them; and in **#98** the situation is repeated, only this time the offending denizen of the deep is a killer whale. "I am too far from my rightful domain!"Namor states angrily. "The fearsome beast knows me not!" He finally

rectifies the situation by beating up the poor fish and forcing it to do his bidding. This leads us to believe that the various forms of undersea life which have obeyed his commands have done so only because they know from past experience that to fail to respond would result in certain punishment.

Where, then, does the truth lie? We all know that Namor has limited telepathic powers, as do all Atlanteans, and we know further that the Atlanteans domesticated various forms of undersea life long ago. We can assume that those denizens of the deep which have obeyed his

CANNOT RESIST...! I AM A MERE PLAYTHING IN MY FOE'S HANDS!
HE IS SENDING ME... WHERE??
HAH! THAT YOU SHALL LEARN, MY FRIEND...
...WHEN YOU ARRIVE THERE!

commands, mental or vocal, have done so only because they realize that to refuse would be at the risk of great pain. Still, how did Namor get the power to imitate fish, and to absorb their very strenght in causes of dire emergency?

We need look no further than the pages of **SUB-MARINER #1**, 1969. Here, we learn that Namor's previously-unexplained amnesia was caused by the villain known as Destiny. Before Namor's birth, Destiny had found the "Helmet of the Ancients" in Antartica. After a time in suspended animation, the Helmet increased both Destiny's physical and mental powers. When Destiny decided to test the Helmet by bringing seaquakes to fair Atlantis, he was opposed by the Sub-Mariner. The two battled, during which time Destiny informed Namor: "I have **plans** in mind—plans for your **future**!" He then induced amnesia in the hapless prince of the deep, forcing Namor to go to New York and assume the life of a derelict. Destiny himself went back into suspended animation in order to let his mental powers reach their height. This, of course, is where we came in.

What were those unnamed plans? We have no idea, for when Destiny finally awoke againa nd summoned Namor to him, the two of them again did battle. Now, it is unlikely that Destiny would draw Namor to him mentally solely to provoke a ten-page fight scene. We can only surmise that those plans had something to do with Destiny's desire for world conquest. It seems likely to me that the Helmet of the Ancients was capable of giving Namor his mysterious extra powers, and that Destiny had intended for the Sub-Mariner to be under his mental thrall when each awoke [Destiny from his suspended animation and Namor from his amnesia].

Can it be that Destiny planned to use Namor as a pawn in his attempt at world conquest? Did Destiny increase Namor's powers in order to make him a more valuable servant, or were the extra powers merely a side-effect o Namor's exposure to the helmet? Can it be that Johnny Storm's discovery of an unnaturally-strong derelict set off a chain reaction that freed the Sub-Mariner from Destiny's mental domination, thereby causing those powers to fade with the passage of time? Anything's possible in the Marvel Universe, but one thing is for certain: we now understand Namor's powers and abilities far more thoroughly than has ever been the case. Hopefully, we have also gone a long way toward rectifying the seeming inconsistencies that have built up around the Sub-Mariner over the years. Perhaps someday Marvel will offer its own definitive explanation for these inconsistencies; until that time, these theories will have to suffice.

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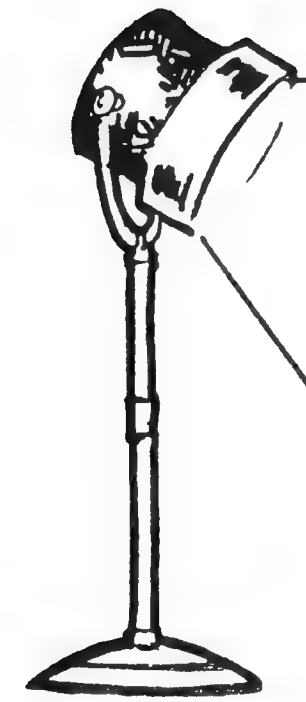
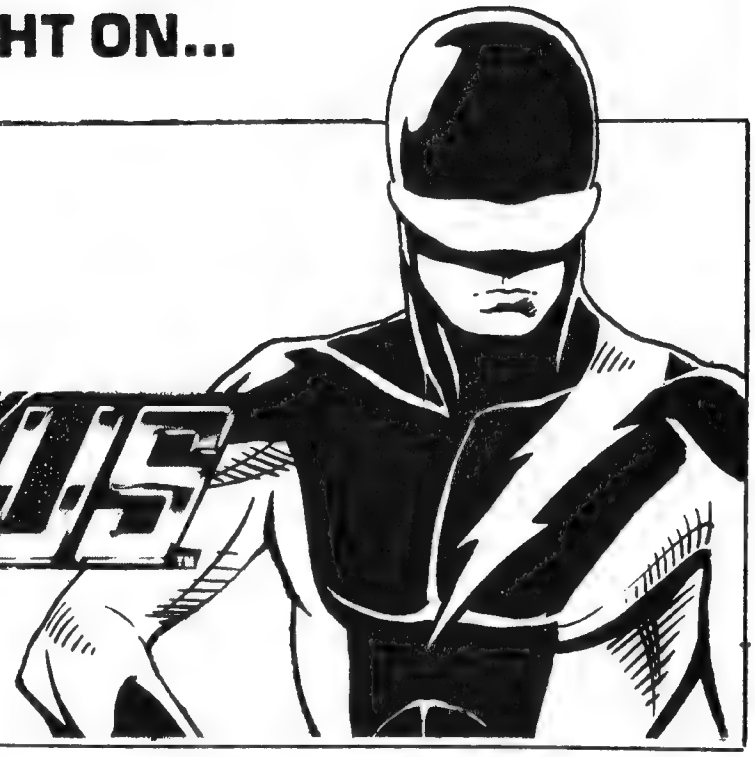


An Interview with MIKE BARON writer of NEXUS



By Maggie Thompson

Mike Baron

Writer MIKE BARON was born in Madison, Wisconsin, and grew up in Mitchell, South Dakota. Since graduating from the University of Wisconsin in 1971 with a degree in political science, he's led a peripatetic existence, working on the late great **Real Paper** in Cambridge, Mass., and at the Boston **Phoenix**.

His comic-related work includes **Tie-Tac**, drawn by **Cartoon History of the Universe** artist Larry Gonick, and articles on comics for **Creem** and **Oui**.

He's currently Music Editor for **Isthmus**, a Madison entertainment weekly and says he divides his time between "writing horror novels and work on breeding a virulent new strain of killer weevils."

LOC: What is your educational background?
Baron: I've got a B.A. from the University of Wisconsin.
LOC: And with that and 25¢ you can get a cup of coffee?
Baron: Exactly right.
LOC: What was your scholarly approach until you were thrust upon the working world?
Baron: I majored in political science with which I planned to try for the diplomatic corps. I went so far as to be interviewed in Chicago for the State Department. When they didn't give me a job right away and said "Come back in a year, kid, and study history," I kind of sensed that I really was not fit to work for a living in the traditional sense. Stories were being written and people were buying them and I could probably do that, too. I guess I always had it in the back of my mind to be a writer.
LOC: Did you feel "I can write as well as that; why shouldn't I make money at it?" or was it "I want to be just like them" or what was it that made you feel you could handle the job?
Baron: You know, it's part of all that; it's unavoidable. I guess so much of it is that a lot of writers grow up inside their heads. You get used to exercising your imagination, so that it pleases you; you realize that you have an asset. And I have always thought of my imagination as my greatest asset, and I have always wanted to do something that I enjoyed for a living. I think most people want to do that. But I suspect that most people don't end up doing it. I even think that people who end up in business and are successes at it just take that as the easy route.

It comes and goes. It's a funny thing. I've been writing for eleven years. I supported myself freelancing except for one disastrous stint with an insurance company for two and a half years — like a mental aberration. I used to live in Boston — not entirely freelance. I was on staff with the Boston **Phoenix** and **The Real Paper** — as associate editor at the **Phoenix** and music editor at **The Real Paper** (part of the Boston scene which has disappeared, unfortunately). And I work at a similar newspaper here in town [Madison, Wisconsin] called **Isthmus** as Scenes and Music Editor. I have a page where we just put in vignettes from city life or whatever-the-hell I can dig up. And I love doing it, it's a lot of fun, but in the meantime it's been my dream constantly to make my living telling stories. I've tried to do novels. In fact, I've written a bunch, and I hope that someday that's what I will also accomplish. But I expect to be using Nexus and his compatriots (who are

coming along later this year in a book called **"HAM The WEATHER WIZARD"**), for a long time, because I love the character. There's a lot there; I'm just beginning to understand Nexus and investigate him.

LOC: Why didn't you head for major companies and major newspapers?

Baron: Well, first of all, let me say that I love Marvel and DC comics, not without exception. I love the ideas and I always find something exciting going on at both companies. Second (and I have had some dealings with people at these companies very sporadically and they have always behaved like gentlemen), it's been my impression that they don't want to hear from you unless you live in New York City. Once you get there and establish yourself, you can move away and get work, but they really have so much talent bursting at the seams within the confines of the isle of Manhattan that they just don't need to take the time here for people in Wisconsin. Not that I have made a concerted effort to approach them. I haven't. Steve Rude and I did complete one twenty-four page science-fiction story, and I sent it to **Epic** about twenty-eight months ago, and I just got it back in the mail last week.

That doesn't really constitute a concerted effort. Everything is a matter of control. These are our concepts and our characters and it's so much more exciting to have control of them, which these guys at Capital Comics have been willing to give us. The character is owned and the logo is owned by Steve Rude and me, and it's been a very happy relationship, and these guys are great. They took a big chance on us. Nobody had ever heard of us; they're just banking on pure talent, and we're just going to give it all we've got.

LOC: How did you make contact with Capital Comics?

Baron: A couple of years ago I met them through mutual friends, and we discussed the possibility of their publishing comics someday, and then we began work on it. And I had another friend who was interested in publishing a book, and got us kind of started. He said, "Listen, Mike, I'm makin' millions here, and I'm gonna have to have a little tax break at the end of the year, and I wanna get a little comic-book company going." This guy subsequently disappeared.

But these guys were interested, and so we did a short story and showed it around, and they were impressed by the art, but it went nowhere. There were a couple of characters there that could be done in a series, but essentially it was frozen. I said, "Let's give it our best shot. Let's do something that has the absolute maximum chance of being accepted.

The Dude and I were batting it around, and I asked some friends, and we had guidance from Capital City Distribution. The consensus seemed to be that in order for a comic book to be an immediate success (or as close as we could get), we should play it relatively safe — and by that we meant superhero. So we wanted to create a superhero, and (given that) I decided, "All right, if we're going to do a superhero, we want something that's different that has enough basis to stand on its own," so we made a couple of priority decisions. One was to stand all superhero conventions on their ear, if we could do it.

This entire series is based on the Second Law of Thermodynamics — which is that energy can only be transformed in one direction, from a state of useful energy to a state of chaotic or useless energy. And that, once you do that, it's gone — ain't no more. And, of course, our society is based at every level on the assumption that energy is unlimited and forever. Now recently we've been waking up to the fact that this is not the case, but it has been a very gentle awakening, it's like the alarm bell going off and you hit it and you get five more minutes of sleep. That's the way Western Civilization is right now. They keep hitting the alarm bell and saying, "Well, five more minutes of sleep; nothing to worry about."

One of the things that fascinated me about the whole superhero genre was the creation of a superpowerful being. Where's that energy coming from? It doesn't just pop up. Part of what we're trying to do with Nexus is, eventually explain where the energy comes for him to do all these wonderful things and, show the consequences of the use of that energy.

When comic books were born (particularly with Superman), the whole fascination was creating this person who was more than human, who had these fantastic powers; the powers were given. And then you come off with some silly explanation. It's not so silly to me. I mean, I love the fact that Superman came from Krypton and when he's under a yellow sun he has all these powers. But that's really a comic-book explanation; it's not an explanation that anyone could buy in a different form. So we're going to address the problem of where Nexus gets his energy directly — but more importantly we're going to address the problem of what happens when man, in all his greed and squalor, has the means to convert energy in ever-greater rates.

And I think we're seeing that now in this country, with the constant fight to exploit our mineral resources — get out the coal; build more nuclear reactors; the only problem is that America's energy-poor; we have to develop our resources to the utmost — which is a stupid way of looking at things. I read **Entropy** by Jeremy Rifkin, and it just says, "Hey, you know, energy is finite. You use it up and it's gone. And when man says 'I've got a more efficient way of using energy,' what he means is, 'I've got a way of wasting energy at a faster rate, so it'll be gone sooner.'"

I do have a lot of ideas squandered on unsold science-fiction short stories over the years that can supply **Nexus.**

LOC: Never throw anything away. Do you see an ending to the Nexus saga?

Baron: Definitely.

LOC: Will there then be no chance of a return for him?

Baron: I can't say that. I couldn't say that. Whether or not I have plans to end **Nexus** definitively one way or another, it wouldn't even matter, but I hesitate to discuss the ending, because people start thinking about that. We don't plan to get to it for many years — not **too** many years —

LOC: But we are seeing a unified whole?

Baron: Yes, yes. A whole story.

LOC: What are the advantages to you of working for alternative publishers?

Baron: There are tremendous advantages of working for a small company. We're all **friends** here. We all hang out together. This company is not large enough for us to — for anybody to feel slighted. We all have ego problems, but I think that they're minimized by the fact that we're all friends, we're all working in a fairly small community, and that we are reflecting the sensibility of our surroundings. You know, I can't tell you how often I open a comic that's produced in New York and I see once again the theme of dealing with the mugger and terror and going out into the street and just the nervous tension which is a reflection of where those comics are produced. So often that comes through, and people who read Marvel and DC comics might get the impression that — I don't know what impression they get, but let's just say we're giving a different impression.

LOC: A different world-view?

Baron: I'd like to think so. I love comics, and they are pop culture, and nobody goes through a comic to see the world-view, but our inadvertently slips in, because of what we're trying to do.

LOC: How do you see the future of alternative publishers?

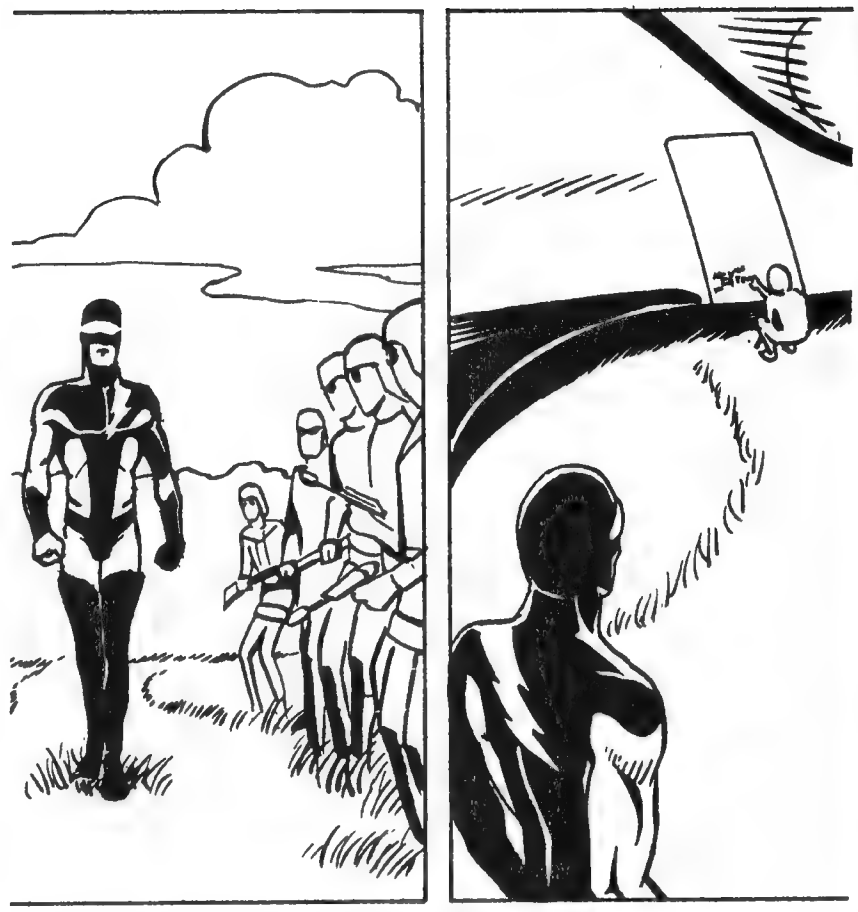
Baron: The potential is unlimited, but I feel very strongly that it depends on the quality of the storytelling. There are many good artists in this country. A lot of them have a lot to learn about storytelling, but there are probably more good artists than there are good writers interested in using this medium.

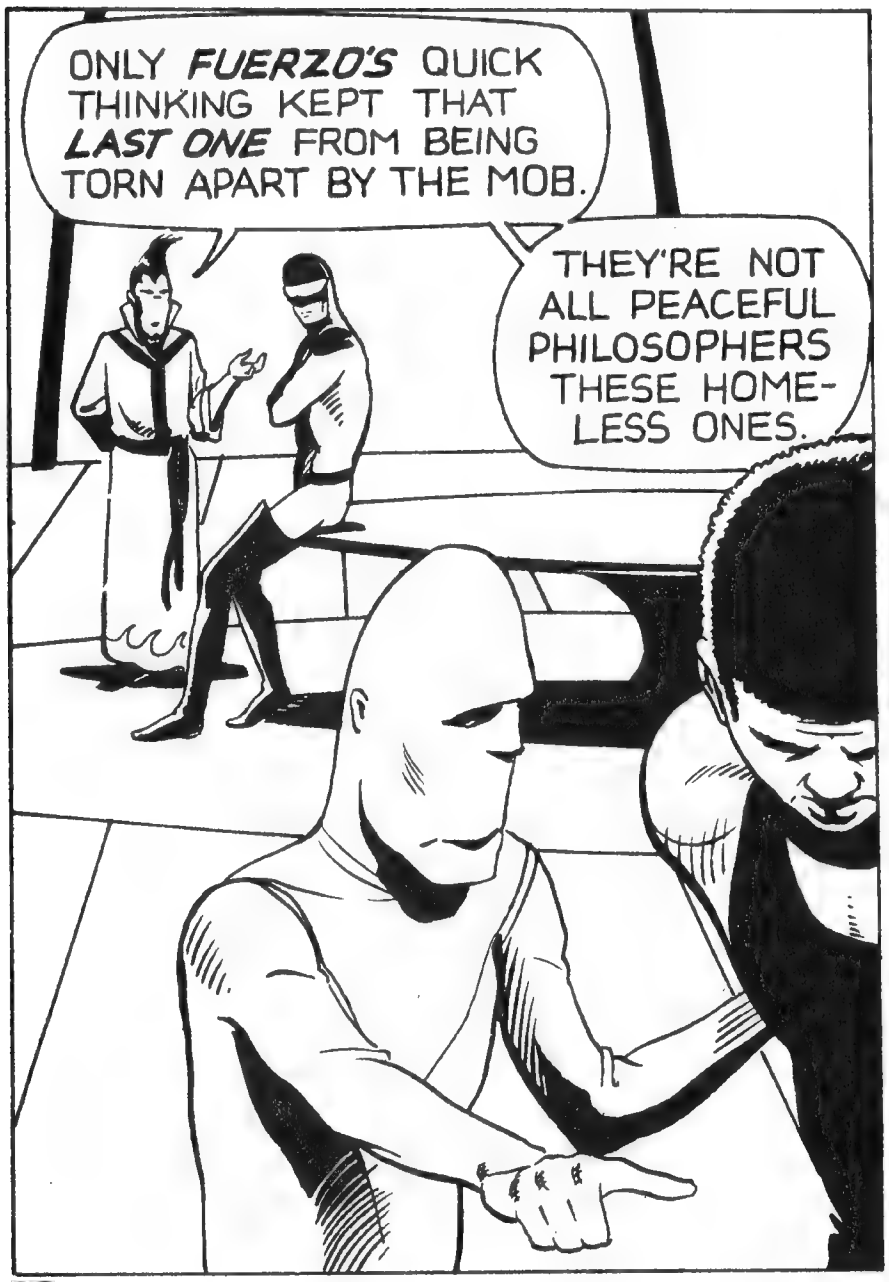
Everybody talks about comics growing up, but it's like the weather — hardly anyone ever does anything about it. If you're really looking for revelation in comics, I think that what Art Spiegelman is doing with **Maus** is far and away the heaviest thing ever done in comics.

LOC: Because he's getting into his own feelings?

Baron: Not **just** because of that, but because he does it so well. It's not just "He's dealing with the Holocaust — that's heavy. We've gotta give the guy respect." That's not it at all, although that's a small part of it. The fact is that he's **succeeding.** He's getting something down in comic-book form which I don't believe has ever been done before — which is the literary experience. It's the human experience, which just has so much more impact that what we're used to, because comics were created as wet dreams for adolescent males, let's face it; that's what superheroes are all about. Art Spiegelman is light-years ahead of everybody else, in terms of what he's saying in his comics.

Not to compare ours to him. This is just popular entertainment — Nexus and the Weather Wizard — but I hope ours will be popular entertainment of a very high order that rewards the reader at every level, not just at the lowest, vicarious-thrill level. For too long comics have just been obsessed with the superhero hitting some guy in the face and special effects, because that's why they were created and because the form itself vindicates the silliest things. You can put things on a comic-book page that you could never get away with in a book or in a play or any other medium, because the audience wouldn't buy it. It would look silly no matter how well it was done. But on a comic-book page, it works.




ONLY *FUERZO'S* QUICK THINKING KEPT THAT *LAST ONE* FROM BEING TORN APART BY THE MOB.
THEY'RE NOT ALL PEACEFUL PHILOSOPHERS THESE HOMELESS ONES.

LOC: Why are there more artists than writers?

Baron: I think that it's a very young field and I think that there are no prodigies in writing. Writing is a skill that's acquired through sheer hard work and willpower. There are prodigies in art, but those guys didn't come by it easily either. It takes a hell of a lot of work to be able to draw like a George Perez or to build yourself up to that point. But I think that, generally speaking, an artist is ready to go much earlier than a writer. A writer takes seasoning. And many of the writers that are working in comics these days are simply too young to tell a compelling story or create believable characters.

But there are some writers — Every now and then you see a flash of something. Like Jerry DeMatteis' Spiderman and Goblin **Team-Up** that I thought was very nice. And he touched upon some broader issues there — nothing heavy — but just warmth and humanity and the beauty and diversity of life, which is so often ignored in the superhero comic, which is concerned at the dumbest level with the stupidest formula plots.

LOC: What other current comics do you read and enjoy?

Baron: You know, I enjoy all of them, even the terrible ones, which I throw across the room in disgust. I enjoy **that.** But I would say that the good ones are **Daredevil** and **Fantastic Four,** of course.

LOC: How do you work on Nexus?

Baron: I have to stress here that this is so much a collaborative effort — that The Dude brings to it things that I had never considered. When he's drawing, he makes these scenes come alive. He puts in characters I hadn't conceived. I take things out of those characters that suggest new avenues for me, so it's his creative concept plus mine colliding with the page, and sometimes we have no idea where it's going to go until the drawing is complete.

LOC: Is Rude local, too?

Baron: Yes, Steve was born here in Madison and grew up in Wisconsin. I was born in Madison.

LOC: How did you come across him?

Baron: We had a mutual friend, an editor named Dave Wagner. One day, Dave said, "There's a guy hanging around

trying to sell comics," and there he was. He wanted to tell comic-book stories and he couldn't write, and I wanted to do it but I couldn't draw.

LOC: Why are you both in Madison?

Baron: Steve goes to New York and he has a good time, but he's essentially a Wisconsin boy, too. I mean, I go to New York, I start freaking out. I lived in Boston for six years, and I enjoyed it. I loved it in the great city, but after a while, the pressure gets to you. I enjoy living in Madison, Wisconsin, where I can hop on my bike and be in the country in five minutes.

LOC: Do you work with Rude in Marvel style, or does he work from a complete script?

Baron: Sort of the former but not really. I draw thumbnail sketches of each page with stick figures. The important thing I contribute is the dialogue as I see it. It's how I pace myself and create those moments in the story that provide epiphany for the reader. To me that's what storytelling is all about. It's when you're going along and all of a sudden you come to a moment and say, "Wow! I never thought of that, but that's exactly the way it should be!"

LOC: I was impressed with the suicide of the mass-murderer's wife in Nexus #2 and their relationship. His line, "Well, my laughing girl, we always knew this could happen," was nicely done, with the art perfectly supportive.

Baron: Thank you, it's my favorite page in the book. It took me by surprise, too. When I got to this part of the story, I realized nobody is totally good or pure or totally bad. That the Zieffer probably had a wife and kids, whom he's concerned about —

HE'S LANDED SOUTH OF THE CITY!
WELL MY LAUGHING GIRL, WE ALWAYS KNEW THIS COULD HAPPEN
I SUPPOSE IT'S USELESS TO ASK YOU TO LEAVE
I LOVE YOU ROLF
WHATEVER HAPPENS, WHEREVER YOU GO...
I'LL BE WAITING.
ZIEFFER MEIRD...
I HAVE COME FOR YOU.
MM-HMM. THAT'S RIGHT.

YOU--TYRONE. YOU'RE RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS WHOLESALE SLAUGHTER.
YOU TOOK LIVES UNNECESSARILY.
FUNNY TO HEAR IT FROM YOU, 'GREAT' NEXUS.

LOC: Nobody sees himself as totally evil.

Baron: I've got a book coming along where the guy's totally evil.

LOC: And he realizes he is?

Baron: He revels in it. It's going to be a very evil book.

LOC: You sound fond of the character.

Baron: Yes, I am. It's Ham the Weather Wizard, featuring the Badger. The Badger is a fanatic, so he's evil as a result, although he sees himself as a hero. Which is why Ham likes him. He says, "I like you. You're a fanatic, and fanatics do bad. And I like bad. You're my friend." The Badger responds, "Don't be ridiculous. I'm making the streets of Madison safe."

Ham starts out in Fifth Century Wales, where he makes himself persona non grata by systematically butchering the neighbors' children in pursuit of his dream, which is bringing perfect weather to the British Isles. His neighbors don't care about that; they're all dying off. So they gather all the Druids together in the world — all the priests — they gather to try and get rid of Ham. Through a long series of events he ends up [1400 years later] in a state mental institution for observation as a John Doe. He eventually begins a new quest and meets the Badger, who comes from a padded cell right down the hall.

Ham is the protagonist — as is the Badger. The Badger is very much my voice speaking, to a certain extent. It's a part of me that I would deny in my better moments. When I'm weak, I can be a jack-booted Fascist as much as the next guy, and I am afraid that it's that part of the Badger that's going to come out. And yet if you say to the Badger, "You jack-booted Fascist," he'd take your head off.

[Audiences have] a steady fascination with all the facets of evil. When I say that what we're planning is going to be evil, I don't mean that the intent is going to be to **create** evil, but that its characters are going to reflect the inner turmoil which rages, I believe, within all of us. You know that phrase, "The best among us have thoughts that would shame Hell." I hope to create a comic where the protagonists in one way or another — they're both completely different — will reflect this void within the human self. Not just the void — there will be good in the book, too. We have a good character, a young psychoanalyst, the first person to succeed in bringing John Doe out of his trance.

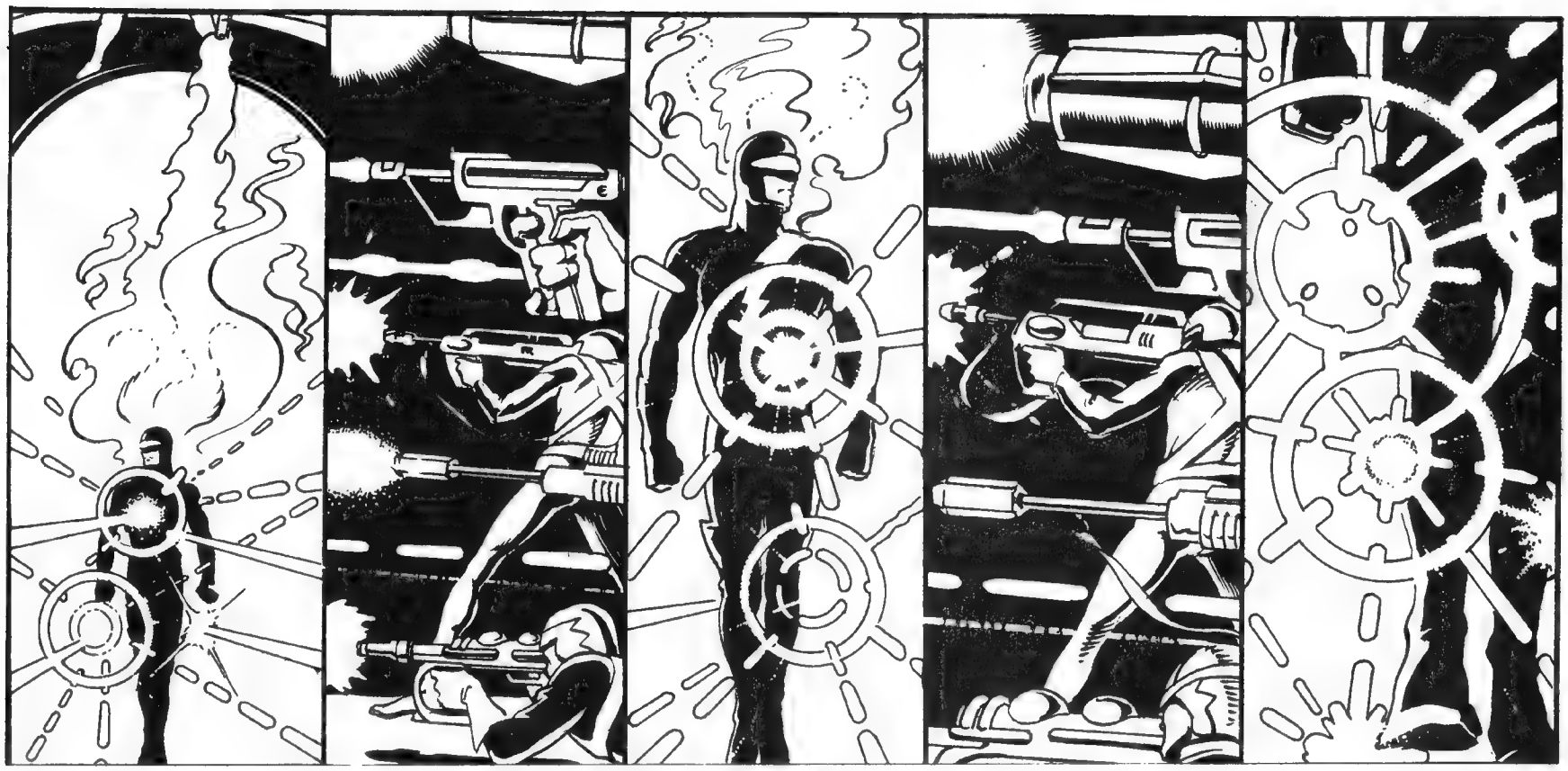
Ham fancies himself a ribald man of the world and he also kills absolutely without compunction. One of the scenes that I have in mind — that we're building up to — is the time when he's trying to sacrifice his neighbor's German Shepherd up on the roof of this castle for some little experiment he's got going. The Badger bursts in upon them; the Badger's full of himself. He's just had a great day stopping muggers, rapists, pickpockets, and litterers, and he bursts in and says, "Stop! Don't harm that animal!"

LOC: Does one root for the protagonist in this case?

Baron: Yes, yes, especially the Badger. The Badger is a Vietnam veteran who suffers a severe personality disorder, and his mind fractures. The interesting thing about a character like this is that when his mind is integrated, when he's whole, when he is who he is (Norbert Sykes, son of a dairy farmer), he's really not a very compelling or effective person. But when his mind fractures and he thinks he's a costumed superhero called The Badger, he's wonderfully effective.

This is based on a book called **The Minds of Billy Milligan** by Daniel Keyes. It's unbelievable. I have to say this: Doug Moench does explore this a little bit in **Moon Knight,** and I admire him for it. But what we're hoping to do with the Badger is going to be, to my mind, mostly based on **The Minds of Billy Milligan** and what that shows about the human mind and what the human body is capable of when the mind fractures and believes totally.

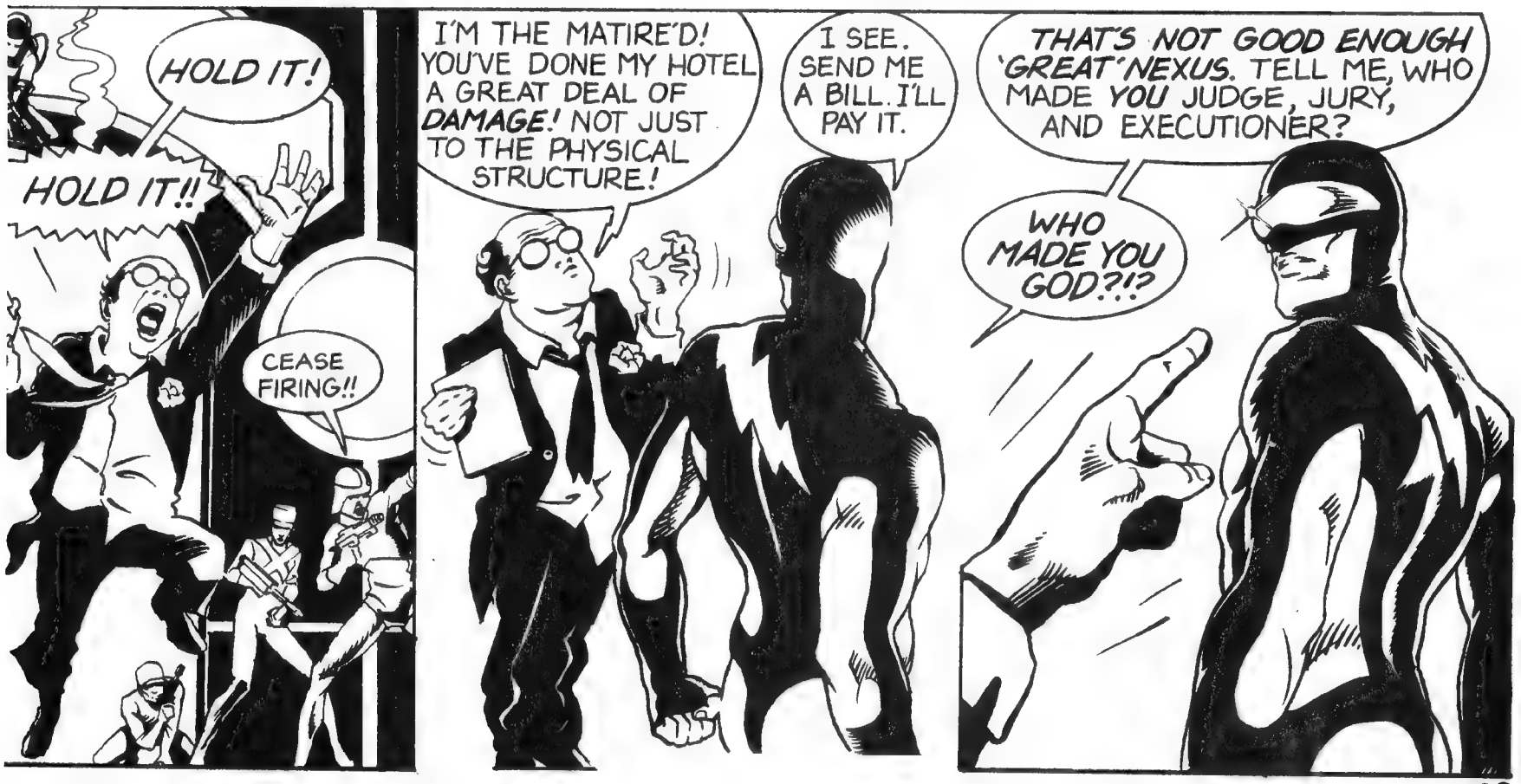
Incidentally, The Badger is an accomplished martial artist in **ja shin do, tae kwon do,** and **shorin ryu** karate.



LOC: Are you involved with martial arts?
Baron: Yes. I really only profess proficiency with **tae kwon do,** which is Korean karate, which I studied for five years. I hold no rank and I claim to hold no rank. In order to have a rank, you have to remain active in a registered school. I maintain my skills. I work out. I have a bunch of friends here in town that are involved in various disciplines, and we get together and work out among us and trade tricks back and forth. If you get heavily involved in the martial arts, they're all drastically different at the bottom but, the more proficient you become, the more they merge at the top.

LOC: Can you tell us more about the three different forms of karate in which the Badger is proficient?
Baron: Tae kwon do means literally the art of striking with the hand and the foot. He's also a master of **ja shin do,** and that is an American hybrid of Korean forms. He's also a master of **shorin ryu,** which is Okinawan karate, in which he received his rank from Tadashi Yamashita, who is head of the International Okinawan Karate Association.
LOC: Is that a real person?
Baron: Absolutely. I've worked out with Mr. Yamashita. I don't know if you've watched kung fu movies, but there's a film called **The Octagon,** starring Chuck Norris. He's in there; he's the chief heavy.

I'm really a creature of pop culture. I collect foreign comics, and the prizes of my collection are the Chinese kung fu comics. And I would love to do that — to copy that form and do an American version. But, of course, those comics are so utterly two-dimensional and shallow; there's nothing going


HOLD IT!
HOLD IT!!
CEASE FIRING!!
I'M THE MATIRE'D! YOU'VE DONE MY HOTEL A GREAT DEAL OF DAMAGE! NOT JUST TO THE PHYSICAL STRUCTURE!
I SEE. SEND ME A BILL. I'LL PAY IT.
THAT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH 'GREAT' NEXUS. TELL ME, WHO MADE YOU JUDGE, JURY, AND EXECUTIONER?
WHO MADE YOU GOD?!?

on; it's non-stop mayhem from start to finish. But I would like to take that form and do something with it which is more than just non-stop mayhem — keep the mayhem in but tell a gripping story and provide some characters.

LOC: What is the form you want to copy?

Baron: I can't read them, because they're in Chinese. What I see there, aside from the hit-hit, bang-bang is technique. First of all, the people that do those comics are concerned with the martial arts and they take pains to portray them accurately, if in a highly stylized and exaggerated manner.

But now I have to point out that there are some domestic comics that deal with the martial arts, and it's as if the creators of those comics are **proud** of their ignorance. It's as if they say, "Hey, we can do something on any subject, and we don't have to know a goddam thing about it. We'll just fake it." But to somebody who knows something about it, these comics are stupid. They're not only stupid, they're ugly.

LOC: You speak of Chinese comics; are they from Hong Kong?

Baron: They're primarily Hong Kong. I understand there are some Japanese martial arts comics, which I've been dying to get hold of, but I haven't seen any. These comics that I'm talking about have this unique type of stylized Chinese artwork, which is really incredible. It's a cross between Saturday morning TV and Chinese poster iconography. But the coloring is very rich and magnificent — and just the sheer force of these figures **exploding** off the page —

They've been doing things with color separation that we're just getting around to now. It's just nonstop, pinwheeling action. It's like watching a Fourth of July fireworks display. I'd love to show them to you; they're the prizes of my collection.

LOC: Do you also delve into the French, Belgian —

Baron: Yes, I like that a lot. But, you know, one of the big disappointments in my life was reading one of those Druillet books in English translation and finding out how boringly mundane the story actually was. But that's all right. Druillet is a genius. He didn't need the language at all. I enjoyed his comics more in French, before I read the English translation, so I could supply my own story. The story was all there in the pictures.

LOC: Getting back to your work, as it slowly catches on do you think readers who begin with, say, Nexus #7 will have problems following the story?

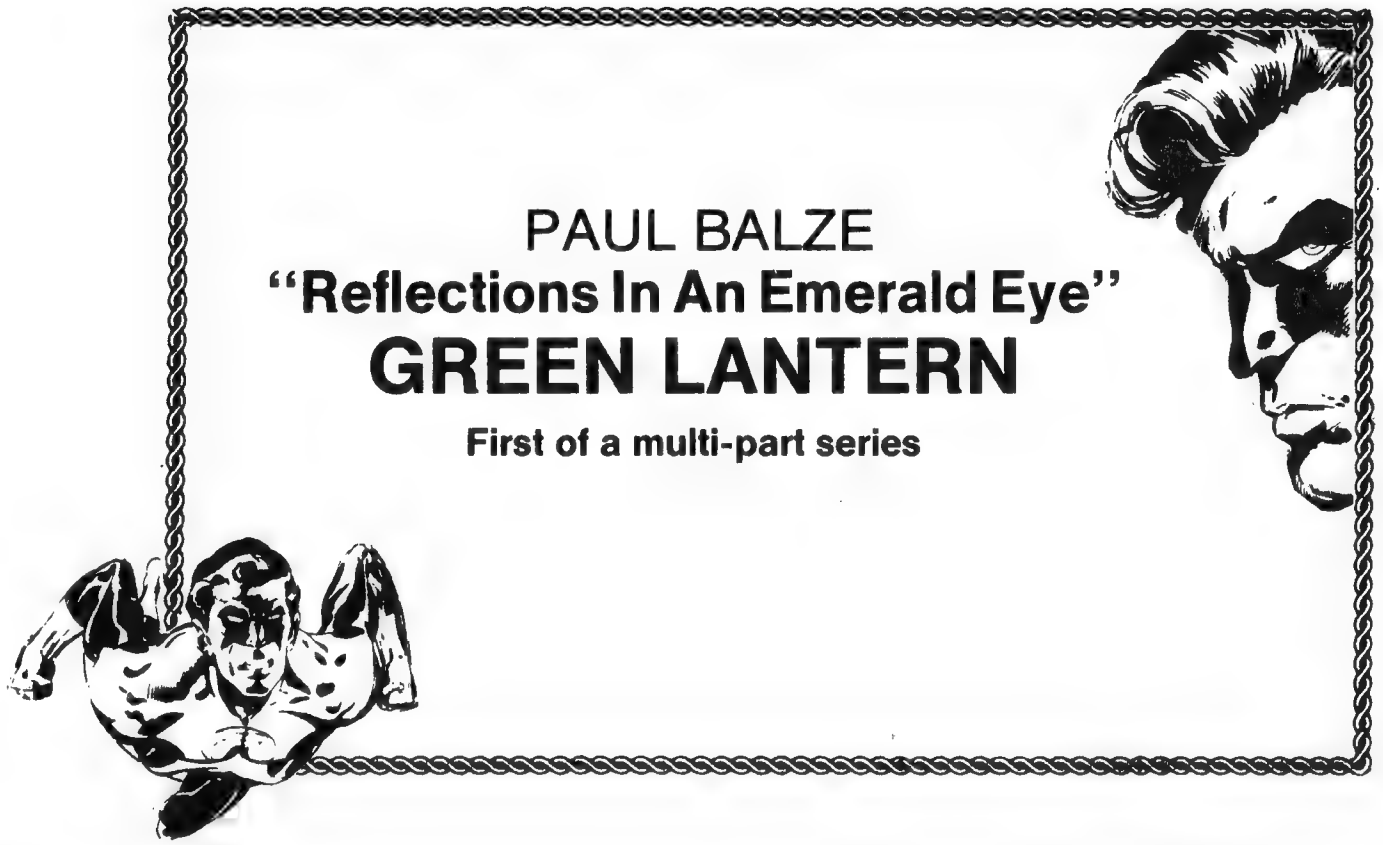
Baron: I hope not. Of course, it's an incredibly complicated and continuing story, because this guy's fascinating to me, and I'm just beginning to discover him myself. But we also want every issue to be entertaining in and of itself. It's like **Hill Street Blues**; you've got a continued story every week, but sometimes you can't see it every week. You've just got to tune in when you can. But if you can't, each hour is so rewarding in its individual characters and textures that, even if you don't know how the particular issue is going to be resolved, you'll go away satisfied.

We really are just getting started, and in the field of comics, of course, it's not just me. I can't do it without these artists. Nobody buys a comic without them. I became serious about writing in 1971, and I actually did some serious writing in that year, but I would say that I really only began to get a grasp of my craft about three or four years ago. Of course, it's a lifelong battle, and I feel I'm just entering the area now where I can tell a competent story in a comic.

LOC: What's your advice to young writers who are now where you were when you got out of college and were thinking of going into the diplomatic service?

Baron: Get the job with the diplomatic service, if you can. Otherwise, take a course in computer programming. You'll never be out of work.

I DO NOT PRETEND TO JUDGE. MY VISITS HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH VENGEANCE. WHAT I DO, I DO BECAUSE I MUST!
I ACT...
...IN SELF-DEFENSE.
HE DOES NOT DREAM OF THE TENDERNESS OF WOMEN.
HE DREAMS OF HISTORY.
HE WAKES...TO NIGHTMARES.



PAUL BALZE

"Reflections In An Emerald Eye"

GREEN LANTERN

First of a multi-part series

1959.

The fifties were drawing to a close. Ike was president. The Bomb was still on people's minds, rock and roll was young, manned space flight was still two years away. And the Silver Age of Comics was in its infancy.

The Silver Age's first creation was J'Onn J'Onzz, Manhunter from Mars who debuted in DETECTIVE COMICS **#**225 in 1955. He was followed by the Flash in SHOWCASE **#**4 in 1956.

By 1959, the Flash was a sure success. His five SHOWCASE appearances had done well enough that he was awarded his own book. THE FLASH **#**105, picking up the numbering of the old FLASH COMICS, bowed with the date Feb/March, 1959.

Julius Schwartz, in SECRET ORIGINS OF THE DC SUPER-HEROES [1976]: "When the returns started coming in on the Flash and we saw we had a hit, the natural instinct was to do something similar. That's how we decided to go ahead with Green Lanter, and I worked on the same theory of givin ghim a new personality, a new costume, a new everything."

The original Green Lanter, created by Martin Nodell in 1940, had been an engineer who discovered a magic lantern and, guided by a mysterious voice from it, made a magic ring through which to channel its power. He adopted a rather flamboyant costume consisting of a red shirt, green pants, red boots trimmed with yellow stripes, a domino mask and a high-collared, green-lined, purple cape. This outfit was supposed to make him a "dreaded figure." Honest! Actually, he didn't adopt the costume until **after** his first case, during which he so thoroughly terrified his prey that the poor slob dropped dead of a heart attack seconds after signing his confession [I guess being carred through the sky by a green-glowing, supposedly-dead man has that effect on people].

True to his word, Schwartz went off on a totally different direction with the new GL. While the original had been clearly magic-powered, the new-model Emerald Crusader [as he came to be called] was deeply rooted in science fiction. He made his bow in **SHOWCASE #22**, Sept-Oct, 1959. The Origin story, **"SOS Green Lantern,"** went as follows:

Abin Sur, alien Green Lanter, is dying in the wreckage of his spacecraft [!] in "a desolte spot in the southwest **U.S.A.**" As dying people usually d, Abin Sur is talking to himself. "No use...fooling yourself, **Abin Sur**...you are dying! You have only a short time to live..." Okay, he's dying. But, his ring is supposed to protect him from mortal harm, as all good GL fans know. So, why doesn't it save him? Because **then**, the story would be over on page two. Can't have that, so Abin sends out a power beam to find a worthy successor, who must be "one without fear! Entirely without fear!" Seems to me I read somewhere that anyone who was entirely without fear wasn't brave, just stupid. Anyway, the beam finds test pilot Hal Jordan, who is sitting in a flight trainer of his own design. The beam rips the cockpit section off the trainer and whisks Hal off to Abin Sur.

Good thing Hal wasn't in the john...

For a dying man, Abin Sur sure has a lot of strength left. He talks on and on for two entire pages, telling how he came to be there, how to work the ring, and how Hal was chosen...then, just as he gives Hal the ring, he dies. Then Hal makes the standard pledgte to fight evildoes everywhere and the origin draws to a close.

Green Lantern made two more SHOWCASE appearances before being awarded his own magazine in 1960. The origin and most of the first fifty-some issues of the series were written by John Broome and drawn by Gil Kane [with a host of inkers]. The stories were, for the most part, pretty good. GL became one of the first DC heroes to have personal problems: his girlfriend-boss, Carol Ferris, decided to marry another man. So, Hal, showing great emotional maturity and level-headedness, chucked his big-bucks test-pilot job and became an insuranc einvestigator, then a toy salesman, and finally an apparent welfare case [though, he always had a car to roam around in!]. Hal also turned out to have a couple of brothers, Jim and Jack. Jim had a wife named Sue, who suspected Jim of being Green Lantern—until Jim grew a beard and GL didn't.

The sixties wore on. By 1970, the book's sales were falling. Apparently, the old space-opera wasn't hauling in the readers as it once had. So, in an attempt to bolster sales, Schwartz added Green Arrow to the book. He also replaced Gil Kane with Neal Adams, who was **the** big artistic gun at the time. He went to then-writer Denny O'Neil and apparently asked for plots that had a bearing on the times. This came to be known as "relevance." The new approach debuted in GREEN LANTERN **#**76 [April 1970] and went on for over two years. In the series, GL, GA and sometimes Black Canary roamed America, fighting racial prejudice, industrial pollution and other chic evils of the early 1970s. GL, perennially the Good, True-Blue American, was subjected to so much disillusioning it's a wonder his brain didn't turn to silly-Putty. However, the series didn't sell any better, so it got the axe with **#**89 [April-May, 1972]. Lots of awards, but no new readers.

Green Lantern didn't disappear completely, however. He was given the backup slot in THE FLASH, beginning with a story that was obviously intended for GREEN LANTERN **#**90 and edited into three parts for THE FLASH **#**217-219 [Aug-Sept, 1972-Dec-Jan, 1972-1973]. Here he stayed for four years, appearning in nice little stories which kept him in the public eye.

Then, in 1975, it was tryout time again. GL was featured in two issues of the 64-page, 50–, all-reprint DC SPECIAL. These issues, **#**17 & **#**20, sold well enough that the decision was made to revive the old GREEN LANTERN book in 1976. Depite the fact that none of the O'Neil-Adams stories had been reprinted, the book was revived under the old GREEN LANTERN-GREEN ARROW logo. Denny O'Neil was made editor as well as writer this time and chose as artist Mike Grell. Grell was fairly new in 1976 and was very popular. He had also been drawing both the GL series in FLASH and the GA-Black Canary series in ACTION.

With the creative team established and the format decided, the first issue was completed.

Unbelievably, it was with no advance notice in any DC book that GL-GA **#**90 appeared in May 1976.

Now, since the focus of this article is supposed to be GREEN LANTERN as a survivor of the 1975-77 new-title blitz at DC, a lot of you are probably thinking of my recent SPECTRE article and mumbling, "My God, he isn't really gonna re-tell every one of the last fifty-some issues of GREEN LANTERN, is he?" Well, fear not. I have no intentions or paraphrasing every single issue of GL since 1976. At least, I'll **try** to avoid it. So read on...freely and unafraid...

GREEN LANTERN **#**90 was different from most "first issues" of the last decade or so in that it was a complete story by itself. That is, it began and ended in the same issue, with no tie-in to **#**91 or anything like that. It was just a good, entertaining story, notable for several reasons: One, the new, improved power ring. Mike Grell designed a very slick-looking ring which, unfortunately, nobody else bothered with for a couple of years, insisting on drawing the old one instead. Two, numberous STAR TREK referencs, such as the blue-skinned Halla's Klingon-style starship, their phaser-like hand weapons and even a Vulcan Green Lantern on page 2. Three, the revelation of a past phase in the evolution of the Green Lantern Corps. The Halla's turn out to be the early-model GLs of 40,000 years ago. There's even a moral at the end. Altogether a pretty good story...

ALTHOUGH YOU WILL FIND THEM MORE POWERFUL, REMEMBER--THEY MUST STILL BE RECHARGED EVERY TWENTY-FOUR HOURS!
--I HAVE HEARD THE CORPS WAS ONCE QUITE DIFFERENT! IT'S NOTHING I WORRY ABOUT--

GL #'s 91 & 92 formed a two-parter featuring Sinestro which involved all kinds of fun stuff. Luckily, the stories themselves were a lot better than the first cover on #91, which was pencilled by Ernie Chan [who I never could stand] and inked by Frank Giacoia [who is sometimes good and sometimes awfully rough]. When I say the stories contained "all kinds of fun stuff, I'm not kidding. Here's how the plot goes, as woven by Denny O'Neil: GL is returning from a boring patrol when he discovers Sinestro messing around on an asteroid. Naturally, the two immediately start to fight. The fight is interrupted by a scene with the Guardians which is purely, as one Guardian puts it, "useless discussion." Sinestro, tricky devil that he is, play shis ace in the hold: a wounded alien GL that he ambushed earlier. Despite the alien's portests, GL speeds him off to Oa for medical treatment while Sinestro goes back to blasting neat bars of ore from the asteroid.

Meanwhile, back at the ran—back on Earth, we find Green Arrow puttering around in his basement workshop [which, oddly enough, no one seems to notice in the boiler room of the tenement], perfectin ghis "cocoon Arrow" [another of the 9438 Gren Arrows! Collect 'em all!]. Then, as Oliver Queen, perpetually-broke-but-always-well-dressed some-time-P.R. man, he picks up his mail [at dawn, yet! **My** mailman doesn't come until late afternoon!]. In the mail he finds an invitation for Green Arrow to compete in an archery contest in the Grand Duch of Shan [naturally, all of GA's mail is forwarded to Ollie Queen. **Think** about that for a moment. How do they even **know** each other? Ah, well, such are the ways of costumed heroes]. Since Ollie has no clients at the moment [he never **does**!], he hops the next plane to Shan.

"Trillions of miles away..." Hal-buddy is talking to his fellow GL. They determine that Sinestro was minind the asteroid. Brilliant! **I** thought he was baking cookies, didn't you? The wounded Lantern tells Hal that "there is a **hydrogen storm** raging in space! **Nothing** could pass through it!" So, of course, Hal recharges his ring and zips off into the storm where he is pelted with meterorites most of the way back to Earth. Say, he'll reall be in top form to battle Sinestro then, won't he?

Wandering the streets of Shan, Green Arrow is aghast at the poverty and squalor there. The whole place is an anachronism or something, looking like a combination of Calcutta, the Barrio and downtown Anywhere, Skartaris [complete with ax-wielding palace Guards]. At the palace, GA meets Yolanda, "Fairest maiden in the land, and is soon locked in a medieval-looking guest room. Later that night, Yolanda comes up to GA's room [I'll pause while the degenerates hoot and whistle] to warn him that the sultan is a phony—"a **monster** from beyond the stars!" [How odd, that everyone in this obscure little middle-eastern country speaks English fluently!]. Yolanda offers GA the key to the room so he can escape, but he refuses. Fool.

Next morning—the contest! GA & his opponent, Abraxis, show off with bull's-eyes for a while, then get the bright idea to each fire two arrows simultaneously and try to pierce each other's shafts. This will decide who wins the prize—190lbs. of pure silver [Know who the fake sultan is yet?]. GA, of course, wins, but the sultan accuses him of tricker and has him—subdued.

Meanwhile, our much-abused ring-wielder has reached Earth at last. He buys a newspaper with the intention of reading himself to sleep.

When GA comes to, he finds himself seated on one tray of a giant scale, poised above a pit of boiling oil. On the other tray is the 190 pounds of silver. The still-hidden sultan tells his subjects that they may each have a bar of silver so they can afford to eat. This, of course, will eventually cause GA's rather gruesome death. As the people file by, GA sends Yolanda after his bow and a certain "Arrow with the purple feathers." Why he made **this** one with purple feathers when all the other have green, I don't know.

Now's your last chance to guess who the sultan really is!

Yup, it's Old Lobster Face himself, Sinestro! He raves on about how this is much better than his original plan [whatever **that** was] because GL will have to "carry the knowledge of his friend's death with him **forever**! And he will be in **agony** knowing **I**—his arch foe—caused it!"

Ye-ah. So why not just wait outside his apartment and zap him with a power beam as he leaves in the morning?

Because **that** would be doing it the **easy** way. And, as longtime comic readers know, **no** villain **ever** does **anything** the easy way.

The purple-feathered arrow turns out to be the cocoon-arrow, and GA uses its epoxy trail as a rope to pull himself to safety. Then in rockets the Lantern [having read about the contest in the paper] to put the kibosh on Sinestro. GA delivers to coup de grace: he dives from the rafters, fists first, right into Sinestro's face. He strikes with an impact that should have snapped Sinestro's neck like a dry twig [not to mention the effect on GA's fists when they smash into the marble floor, back by his full plunging weight].

The end. The two stars have appeared together in exactly 3 panels in 18 pages.

Some team-up, huh?

#92 was a fun little peace. It was here that O'Neil introduced that neat little reality-hopper, the Silver Twist. The shtick was that Sinestro broke jail [with a spare power ring in his belt, no less!] and headed for the twist with out two Green pals in hot pursuit. GL tells Sinestro not to mess with the

WHAT IN BLUE BLAZES IS THAT?
UNLESS I'M MISTAKEN, SINESTRO IS HEADING FOR THE MOST MYSTERIOUS OBJECT IN THE UNIVERSE... THE SILVER TWIST!
CAN SINESTRO USE IT AGAINST US?
I'M TRYING TO RECALL WHAT I WAS TAUGHT DURING GREEN LANTERN TRAINING...
THE TWIST CAN APPEAR ANYWHERE, AT ANY TIME... NO ONE KNOWS WHO CREATED IT, OR FOR WHAT PURPOSE!

Twist, which resembles a big, silver Mobius strip, so of course Sinny fires a power beam through it.

The next thing anyone knows, our heroes [and villain] wind up in what appears to be a world in its medieval period—and somehow, nether of the ower rings work. Then it turns out that this medieval world has electricity—and **more**!

The STory is called "The Legend of the Green Arrow!" Me, I call it "Robin Hood meets Science Ficvtion, guest starring Green Arrow!"

Scund absurd? Get this plot: Good King Richard Stoutarm has gone off on the star wars. In his absence, his evil brother Prince Yuan has built a great tower which saps all energy [hence the dead rings], keeping the people cold and in the dark. After an elaborate ruse [requiring Sinestro to dress like a jester—priceless!!], the two Greens & Skinny enter and trash the tower and finally save Rickard's fleet from Yuan's attacking ships [this is in **space**. folks!] before the Twist yanks them home. Except for Sinestro, that is. He disappears, to come and harass GL another day. And, mixed up in all this, is the lovely Mais Marion.

Gee, I'll bet that really took a lot of effort to write!!

Following that merry little ripoff is one of the longest, most convoluted Green Lantern stories ever written: It runs seven issues [#93-99, Feb/March 1977-December 1977] and involves a seemingly endless string of plots, which are made to seem even more ridiculous than they are being crammed into the space of a few days.

Ready? Here goes...

It's Thanksgiving DAy, 1976. Carol Ferris is having some friends in for dinner—Hal Jordan, Ollie Queen, Tom [Pieface] Kalmaku and Dinah [Black Canary] Lance. Outside, there is snow on the ground—in Coast City, which is in California. Well, maybe Carol had it flown down from Washington. Everybody's about to dig in when Hal is contacted by one of the Guardians to stop an invasion from space striking Coast City. It turns out that the spaceship is grabbing Earthlings to colonize other planets with. GL trashes the kidnappers, returns the colonists who want to go home, and treks back to Earth. Meanwhile, a bunch of Federal agents crash Carol's party and, using their best Gestapo tactics, arrest Green Arrow.

As the feds are hauling away Green Arrow, the Lantern returns and tries to stop them. They, of course, try to waste him, first with bullets, then with a neat little laser they just happen to have handy [Of Course! Federal agents **always** carry laser rifles around in the passenger compartments of their cars! Didn't you know that?]. GL subdues them, frees GA, and in the space of a few seconds becomes deathly ill.

John Stewart, the Black alternate Green Lantern, is summoned to take Hal to Oa for treatment. How lucky that he happened to be home, alone, on Thanksgiving night instead of away visiting relative like 30 million other people.

As soon as Stewart leaves, GA tells Dinah that he's off to find out who tried to nab him. Why **she** doesn't just tell him, I don't know. GA also asks her to stay behind because he needs "A reason to **survive**!" So, of course, she's in costume and on his trail in two panels.

Meanwhile, Carol and Pieface worry about Hal.

"750 miles and a day later," the Arrow finds the feds' stronghold. He trashes two guards and a hidden Black Canary trashes a third. GA decides that, to infiltrate the farmhouse headquarters, he must drastically change his appearance. How does he plan to blend in? Why, by shaving his mustache & beard and putting on a trenchcoat and hat over his costume [while leaving his mask on, by the way]. Then he hops the electrified fence [courtesy of his "bolo-arrow"] and SURPRISE!! The nasties have watched his every move! The Canary tries the same arrow stunt and is promptly captured. So much for her!

Ollie's not inside the building five minutes when he's attacked by a bunch of trenchcoated goons with billy clubs. Naturally, he creams them all without even working up a sweat [which is a feat for anyone inked by Terry Austin].

Meanwhile [bet you're getting tired of hearing that], the two GLs encounter a black hole [ominous

chord]...and Stewart, inexperienced as he is, has no idea how to resist it [this **is** after all, only his third apperaance ever].

GA ksuccessfully totals three more trained, armed professional killers with his bare hands and meets their leader, Col. Thaddeus Lucius Krisp. Krisp produces BC, who is in a rather gruesome deathtrap [strapped to two giant gears which, if they move, will tear her in half. This is a trap worthy of the Spectre!], and gives GA his "assignment": killing the President of the United States!! The catch is that if GA refuses, Krisp will release the remote-controller keeping the gears from revolving. This means that unless Krisp keeps constant, unrelenting pressure on that little button, Black Canary will get to do a Duo Damsel impression. GA leans this when he starts decking everyone in Kirsp's office. The gears Start moving and...

CLICK! Scene change!

A couple of aliens pull Hal & Johnny out of the black hole and—wouldn't you know it!—they discover **exactly** what's wrong with Hal and just by the wildest of coincidences have **just** the machine necessary to cure him. Of course! **Why** these guys are cruising the spaceways with his machine, only Denny O'Neil can say. The cure—a pseudobattle between Green Lantern and an image of himself as Hal Jordan—begins, and—

CLICK! Back to Krisp's place! GA takes the assignment to save Black Canary.

CLICK! Back to the Lantern-Jordan fight [isn't this just like trying to watch two TV shows at once?]! Three pages of fist-fighting and psychobabble! GL soundly defeats "Jordan." Now, **think** about this a second: The aliens explain the cure like this: "In [the Telluatron], a person must confront his **deepest fears**—and **defeat** them!" Then the machine creates a bogus Hal Jordan. Ergo, Green Lantern's greatest fear is—**himself**!!

Hmmmmmmmm...

Back on Earth, the time for GA's try at the President draws near. How long has it been since he accepted it?

"...it is impossible to **say** how many hours, days or **weeks** have passed..."

COP-OUT! COP-OUT! COP-OUT!

Ahem. GA takes his shot. He has used an Arrow rigged with "a **gas**...one that temporarily **freezes** people without doing **permanent** damage...that'll keep Krisp's thumb pressing the button and the bird-lady **alive**!"

However, the two helicopters circling the area don't **know** that. So, when they see the President's party sprawled on the ground, they decide to blast the tree GA's hiding in off the face of the Earth.

Incredibly, every one of the "rain of steel-jacketed **slugs**" misses GA before the two Lanterns show up to save the day. BC is freed, Stewart flits home to comics oblivion, and everyone lives happily ever after.

Or so it seems at the end of GREEN LANTERN #95 [Yes! We've still got four issues to go before the **real** end!].

Surely, Carol Ferris must have been Getting tired of all this company by the beginning of GL #96. Remember GA shaving off his beard in #94? By #96, it's fully regrown. Remember #93, when it was snowing? By #96, the snow is gone and the shrubbery is lush and green! So what is fix months real time separated #93 and #96? Don't tell me Dinah spent four months chained to those gears [Suddenly it occurs to me! What if Krisp's thumb had gotten tired? **Nobody** can keep constant pressure on something like a plunger **forever**! Well, Denny? Let's hear it! How? Why??? What?? ARRRRRGGGHHH!!!!!!]!

Okay...I'm all right, now...Back to the subject at hand [This is going on forever!]. Green Arrow and Black Canary are leaving the Ferris mansion. They've gone about six steps when GA spots, plunging from space—Katma Tui, Green Lantern of Korugar! GA's "fission arrow" stops her from leaving a fair-sized crator in Carol's lawn, not to mention from splattering. Her assailant—another alien GL—showqs up and is he ticked! Somehow, Green Arrow survives a brawl with him before Hal shows up. Katma mumbles "terrible danger...**Oa**..." before passing out. This, of course, sends Hal off to Oa faster than you can spit, leaving

Ollie, Dinah and Carol to take care of this alien woman they've never even met and know nothing about. Cute.

Near Oa, Hal encounters an enormous spacecraft (which we'll be hearing a lot about soon). But, before he can investigate it, he has to deal with Katma's attacker. Hal defeats the alien with absurd ease (Just **once**, can't Hal meet another GL who's better at it than he is? Surely there are others among the 3600 Lanterns with more skill and more experience than Hal!). GL lights on Oa and finds himself surrounded by other Gls, who—SURPRISE AGAIN!—try to fry him with their power beams!

'on Earth, Katma has come around. She says, "An **outsider** has seized control of the **Guardians**...and the **Green Lanterns**!"

Wow!! **Really**, Katma? I **never** would have guessed! Too bad Hal doesn't know the Guardians are affected! He (literally) drops in on them and they say, "We can **assist**!...First...give us your **ring**!"

No, Hal! Don't do it!!!

No, Hal! Don't do it!!

"Okay...if I can't trust **you**...!"

Jordan, you stupid sod!

Yes...you **trust** us—and **that** is your **fatal error**!" The Guardians overpower Hal, though it takes six of them just to hold him (He **is**, after all, twice their size). In a mixture of rage and disillusionment, he breaks free. As Hal tussles with the Guardians, The other Gls burst in. One of the guardians is accidentally fried by a concentration of power beams and everyone snaps out of their trance to ask the musical question, "How can an **immortal DIE**—?"

One of the Guardians makes the **brilliant** observation that "We are gravely **threatented**!", so the Lanterns take to the skies—where they are promptly attacked by the clouds. Hal notices a spaceship zipping around the clouds (Why nobody else?), so he blasts his way in.

"I **could** pass through like a **ghost**...", he thinks, "but I want him to **know** he has **company**!" Good, Hal! So don't be surprised when you get your silly self gassed one panel after you get in!

Gee, he's developing all the subtlety of a head-on collision! Green Arrow'd be proud, considering that's the way he'd probably handle it!

As GL crumples to the spaceship deck, we switch back to Earth where we are treated to a little of Green Arrow baiting a doctor (who has an inexplicable foreign accident). The doctor decides to move Katma to a hospital. Black Canary notices how protective GA is of Katma and thinks to herself, "Darned if I'm not feeling....**jealous**!" Damn, woman!! Every time he's tried to protect **you**, you've made it quite clear that you neither need or want his protection!

Outside, we meet a bunch of characters who are easy winners of the Silliest-Denny-O'Neil-Characters-of-1977 Award: Junior Musto and his gang!

Junior and his buddies see GA carrying Katma from the mansion in a sheet. They assume that it is Carol Ferris, because "These **rich** Americans are **always** being carried!"

Huh-**What**???

Junior and one of his buddies burst out of the bushes. The doctor, seeing these two gunmen running at him screaming, "**CHARGE**", reacts with real alarm: "Yes—? I can **help** you?"

Not unless you're a psychiatrist, doc...

Junior's introduction is reminiscent of the meeting of B.D. & Phred in **Doonesbury**. "I'm **Junior Musto**, the **terrorist**! My father is **Musta Musto**, the terrorist! Maybe you **heard** of him?"

Snicker, snicker, snicker....

Teheran it ain't. Green Arrow and Black Canary utterly destroy all four terrorists in pretty short order, giving Katma a chance to prolong things by wandering off somewhere. GA & BC bitch at each other for a minute and start searching for her.

Oa...

Green Lantern has played possum (Surprise!) long enough to lull his captors into a false sense of security. As they prepare to interrogate him, be breaks loose and wipes up the floor with the bunch of them. Turns out that their sister ship is supposed to rain "Cobalt bombs" on Oa. What they actually do, though, is to fire one measly bomb at Hal, who deflects it—right into the side of the giant spaceship (remember it?). Through the wound in the ship comes our first glimpse of the creature who will

keep the action rolling along till #99. This is also the last we see of the invaders of Oa. Really!

GL flits back to Oa, where he recharges his ring at the central power battery [which seems to vary in size from appearance to appearance]. Oddly enough, Denny O'Neil seems to hvae forgotten how the power batteries work. In #87, Hal tells John Stewart, "Energy is broadcast by tachyon transmission from the **master power battery**...to these batteries!" Yet, in #97, the footnote on p. 14 says, "It's this awesome instrument that broadcasts power to all corps rings...somehow!" You can sure tell **he** looks at his old stuff!

Suddenly, a "hideous" laugh comes from the battery, followed by an image of Green Arrow. Green Lantern is obviously surprised to see Green Arrow pop up on Oa. After all, teleportation is one thing GA can't do with an arrow. Funny how the Lantern doesn't notice that **this** GA is orange and glowing. In fact, it doesn't even occur to him that this just **might not** be the real GA until an arrow it shoots passes through him harmlessly.

It takes a special kind of man to be that slow on the uptake...

When GL blasts the fake GA, we see "The Mocker!" Boy, does he look silly! Orange skin and pinkish-red hair, with mustache, beard and eyes to match! And on **top** of that, his dialogue is just **dripping** with Brittish accent! Why an alien has a British accent, I'll **never** understand. It turns out the Mocker's responsible for all the confusion that's been plaguing Oa. This revealed, he flicks GL back to Carol's living room.

The two Greens and Black Canary reunited, they tell each other what they've been up to. Then a ghostly figure of BC's late husband, Larry Lance, appears. Dinah, of course, walks right at it-him. GA has to deck BC to keep her from touching the figure. Then GL tries to imprison Ffa'Rzz [the Mocker's true name], but he disappears from the power-beam cage.

GL & GA decide to search for Katma Tui, who is still wandering the streets of Coast City. Meanwhile, Musta Musto [snicker] has managed to spring his idiot son. They spot Katma and kidnap her. Surprise! Katma's ring is out of power! Luckily, someone thought to get her back in costume or she'd be a sight to see after dropping the sheet. Trying to escape, Katma grabs the wheel of Musto's car and sends it plunging off a bridge.

"But, wonder of wonders, it is stopped short in mid-air!..." Wow! GL & GA showed up just in the nick of time! Good thing the car wasn't yellow...

Our emerald buddies clean up the Musto bunch jiffy-quick, so Ffa'Rzz attacks. Of course! Then, inexplicably, he takes off before doing much of anything [I know when I'm not wanted!"]. The Musto gang also escapes, never to be seen again [no big loss]. Green Arrow and Green Lantern sla Musto's car. Here's his explanation:

> "Back at **Carol's**, I noticed the **lamp** was **burning** when **Ffa'Rzz** was giving us grief—and a moment ago, the limousine's **headlights** were on! **Conclusion: Ffa'Rzz** draws **energy** from the nearest available **power source**! **Without** a power source, he's **formless**...a soul without a **body**!"

Gee, how lucky that there are no street lights, power lines, phone booths or other cars "nearby"! GA, who is suddenly the brains of the outfit [!], further concludes that since Ffa always shows up where Hal and Katma are, they must be carrying him.

Think hard, now. If **you** were Green Lantern, and were given that little piece of information, what would **you** do? Me, I'd order my ring to search out any alien presence on me [and, in Hal's case, on Itty*] and expel it. But, obviously, Hal's mind don' work that way, man! He just arbitrarily decides that

YOU'RE MOCKING ME!
OH, YES, YES, I AM... CLEVER OF YOU TO NOTICE!
IT WAS YOU WHO ALLOWED THE ALIEN ATTACKERS TO SNEAK THEIR PSEUDO-GUARDIAN PAST THE DEFENSES!

he & Katma must "**leave** the **Earth**...perhaps **forever**!" Then he tells GA to "say boodbye to Carol and Dinah for us." and prepares to leave. But—get this!—GA says, "Where **you** go—**I** go!" So **nobody** tells Carol and Dinah **nothin'**! The

Lanterns recharge their rings and zip off to Oa with Ga right then and there!

Investigating a mammoth spaceship orbiting Oa, our Green buddies tangle with Ffa'Rzz again, temporarily defeat him, and find a doorway to the inside of the ship. GL has Katma translate the inscription above the door [I guess he figured she might as well do **something** besides stand around making John Broome fans go "Ooh, Ahh!"]: "We are on the Edge of the Ultimate Ending!"

And so begins **GREEN LANTERN #99** [Don't worry, folks, we are on the edge of the ending of this story.] After the mandatory recap, Green Arrow inexplicably picks a fight with Green Lantern [complete with glowing green boxing ring] and soon "the air around them is filled with the sound of their tortured breathing..." [**air** in a **vacuum**???].

Scene change!! Black Canary is doing her morning exercises in Carol Ferris' backyard when a tractor-trailer pulls up [right next to the pool, in fact]. Turns out it's to be delivered to Carol. The driver tries to [literally] pick up the Canary, who responds by smashing him to the pavement. How sweet and feminine of her!

Carol comes outside, dressed rather lightly for late November [remember, all this started at Thanksgiving dinner!], and explains that the truck is Hal's and that she lent him the down payment [which, considering that those suckers cost over $100,000, musta been considerable]. Then Carol & Dinah think of the men "they may be willing to admit they love." Gee, they sound almost ashmed of it!

This provides us with yet another handy-dandy scene change back to the monolithic spaceship. The Lanterns and the Arrow make their way to a huge room "like a **dream**...a **bad** dream! Defies all **sense**...all **logic**! And that means it can only be the work of..."

Timothy Leary?

Stanley Kubrick?

Gerry Conway [a cheap shot]?

No! It's good old reality-warping Ffa'Rzz the Wonder Changeling!! And that's not all! He's been hiding in everybody's favorite space-starfish, Itty! And, on leaving Itty's body, he shows his real [?] form, a scaly humanoid type!

He quickly captures the three Emerald Crusaders [there! Finally said it!] and deposits them in three cocoon-thingies on the side of his ship, where they will freeze, yet remain totally conscious to "reflect on how **senseless** the universe is!" It turns out that Ffa'Rzz is the last survivor of a magnificent race who achieved total happiness only to be wiped out by a mysterious plague—all except Ffa'Rzz, who set out to "**prove** that life is brutal, pointless and **stupid**!"

Wow, man...guess they can't **all** be Superman... SURPRISE! Yet again!! Hal shows up—the **real** Hal. He reveals that the Hal in the cocoon is a fake created by the power ring to fool Ffa'Rzz and let the real Hal capture him. Incredibly, it has been strictly Green Arrow's plan, working perfectly, from word one! What the matter, can't the Lantern come up with his own plans anymore? And it's **his** magazine!! **Geez**!

As this longest week in history closes, Katma Tui delivers Ffa'Rzz to Oa and GL & GA flit home, spouting philosophical babble all the way.

And that's the way it was, **GREEN LANTERN #99**, December, 1977. For the reader, it took nearly a year!

Sure was a busy week...!

NEXT TIME: It's 1978! **GREEN LANTERN #100**! Air Wave II! Adios, Mike Grell! Buenos Dias, Alex Saviuk! Master-Tek! Sonar! More about Itty! And I'll try to keep it shorter! 'Bye now!!

END PART ONE

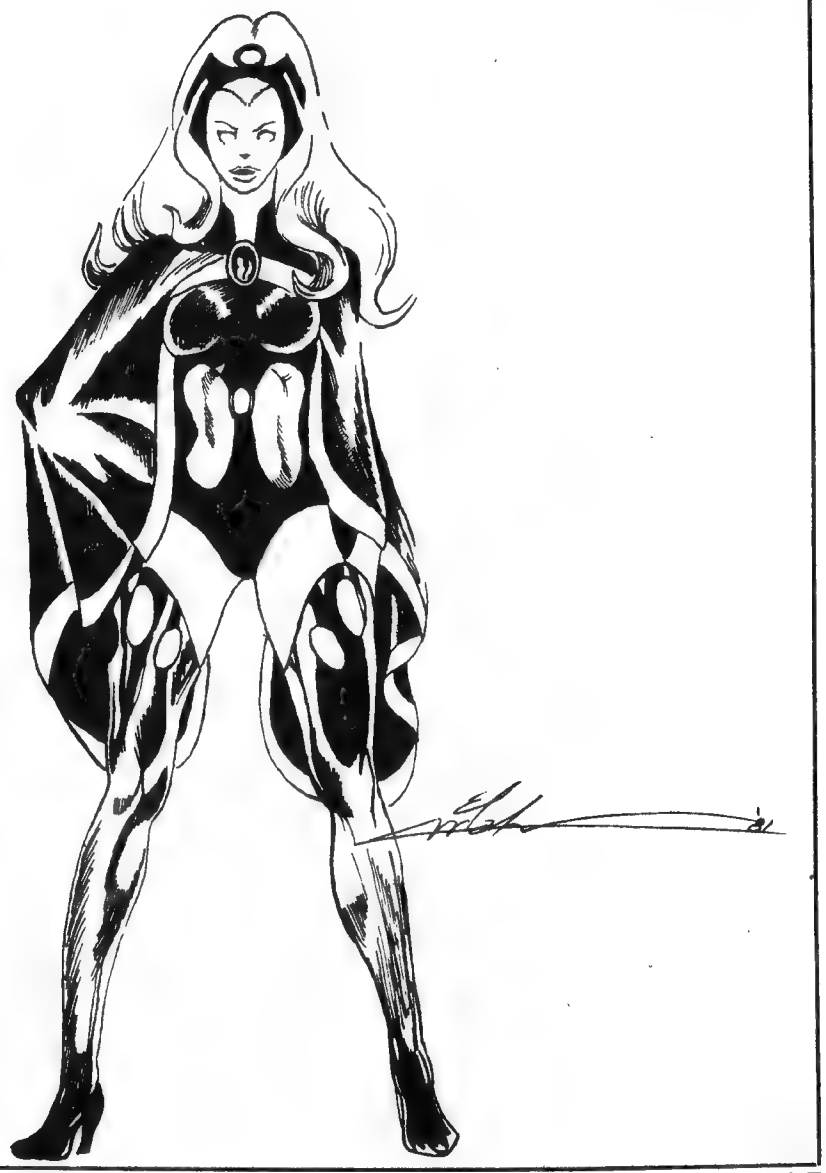
FANDOM'S SHOWCASE

Art

LOC is pleased to introduce a new section which will present the artwork of you, the LOC reader. This issue marks the first appearance of FANDOM SHOWCASE which will publish the artwork and the fiction submitted to us. These sections will appear every month. We look forward to seeing your work appear on our pages. Please carefully mark your work with your name, address and phone number and if you wish its return please include an SASE.

USAF

BILL HARVEY



TOM LINEHAN'S ART WORK HAS APPEARED IN LOC AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS BEFORE. YOU CAN SEE MORE OF TOM'S WORK IN THIS ISSUE. CHECK OUT CAPT. HEROIC!

MARK MARDEROSIAN'S ART IS ALSO WELL KNOWN TO FANDOM. HIS SPANKY, SPACE CADET IS IN THIS ISSUE OF LOC, TOO!

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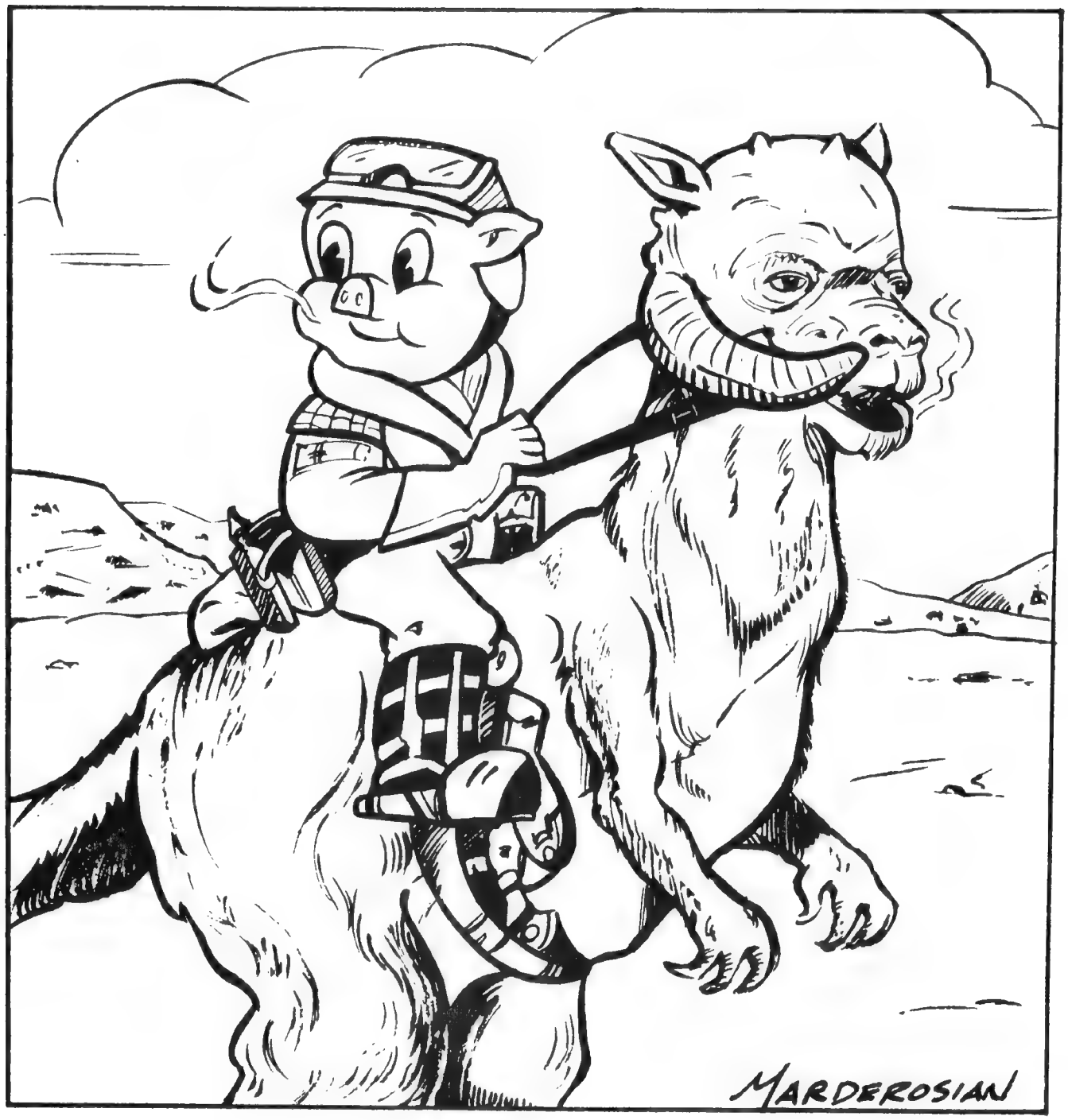

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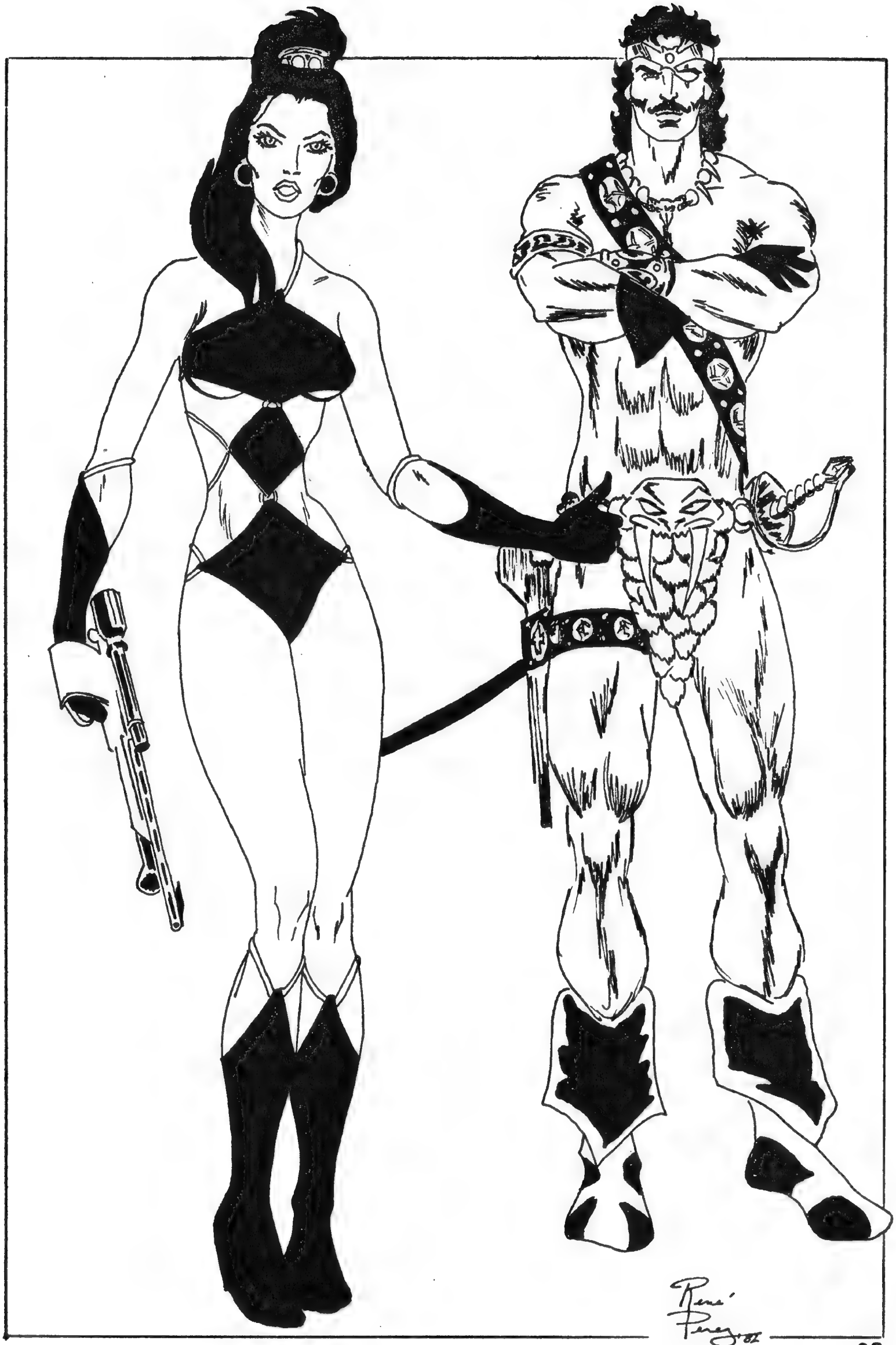
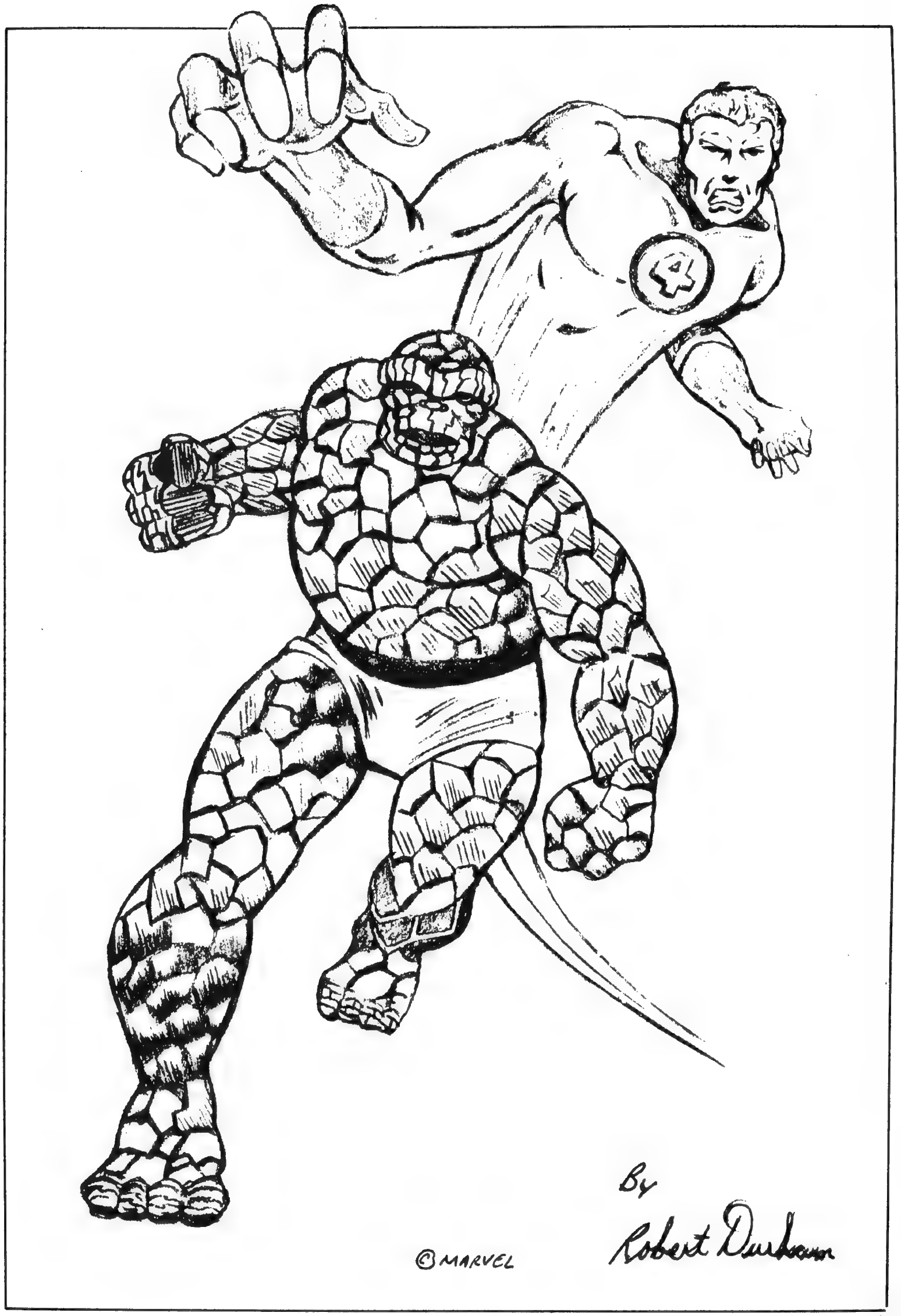

René Perez

LARRY WORK'S AS AN ANIMATOR FOR MARVEL ANIMATION. YOU'VE ALSO SEEN HIS ART IN CHARLTON BULLSEYE.



By
Robert Durham

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DAN REED'S ART WORK APPEARED IN CHARLTON'S BULLSEYE #1

YEEECCHHH
TIK
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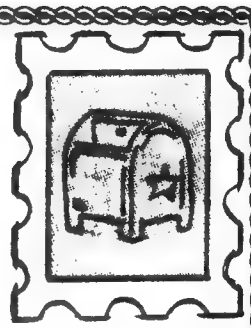
DEL BEITO



MARGARET O'CONNELL
A discussion of fantasies

"SOME REASONS WHY PEOPLE READ COMICS"

I have never been a fan of fashion magazines or daytime soap operas [no, I don't watch **dallas** either]. So I was rather surprised to discover how accurately Carol Kalish's description of the gender-specific entertainment interests of women [in **"Why Women Don't Read Comics," LOC #1**] fits me. Like Kalish's lumped-together mass of hypothetical female readers, to a large extent I am "looking specifically for those extra bits, the characterization elements, that are added as an afterthought to the [super-hero] comic-book story." After all, how many other people do you know who read the Marty Pasko issues of **SUPERMAN** for the subplots focusing on the relationship between Superman/Clark Kent and Lois Lane? And although I've never thrown a comic across the room in disgust because of the heroine's abysmal taste in headgear [actually, I found Foggy Nelson's bizarre green and magenta plaid tuxedo, and the even more grotesque yellow-with-oversized-green-spots ensemble sported by his previously unheard of "old college chum" Porkchop Peterson, much more of an eyesore than the hat Heather wore to Foggy's wedding in **DAREDEVIL #166**], I must admit that it bothers me when Peter Parker and his pals appear in issue after issue dressed in the kind of shapeless, mud-colored garments favored by artists like Jim Mooney, Sal Buscema, and Don Perlin.

Even Kalish's conclusion that "women tend to be either indifferent or negative towards action" is true of me, up to a point. Chase scenes in movies generally bore me, and I thought the much-acclaimed dogfight at the end of **STAR WARS** lasted several minutes too long. I feel the same way about Frank Miller's showily-choreographed scenes of Daredevil trashing whole barrooms full of thugs, and Batman's judo chops and Superman's boxing matches at 30,000 feet usually make me yawn. So what on earth am I doing reading comics?

Well, what is anybody doing reading comics? There are some people [probably a minority] who simply happen to like the unique combination of words and pictures on paper as an artform—but even they probably didn't start out that way when they first began reading comics. And there are some people—apparently quite a lot of them, at least in the two big companies' opinions—who are mainly interested in comics for the Obligatory Fight Scenes and other displays of raw power they so consistently deliver. After all, super-hero comics are basically power fantasies, as demonstrated by the fact that violence and [usually heavily-emphasized] physical struggle are considered perhaps the most essential elements of the genre. Traditionally, whenever a particular title's sales become dangerously marginal, the scripter is ordered to forget about subtler features like characterization and hand in stories consisting of action, action, and more action.

The appeal of repeated episodes in which the good-guy protagonist, whom the reader certainly roots for and often secretly identifies with, triumphs over people who try to oppress or push him around and/or innocent parties—a triumph achieved in the unequivocal manner possible only when the struggle is portrayed in purely physical terms—is obvious when you remember that the comic-book audience is composed largely of children, who are still small enough to be physically intimidated by anyone larger. Even people who continue to read comics past their early teens are most often those whose own experience has predisposed them to

identify with a character like the "Puny" Parker of the Lee-Ditko **SPIDER-MAN** issues, rather than with a full-time jock like his unassailably invincible nemesis, the bullyingly self-confident Flash Thompson. For most such readers, the very specific gratification of vicariously attaining the power to pulverize people like those musclebound creeps who kick sand on the "too skinny" teenager at the beach in the archetypal comic book ad, by means of identifying with that idealized reader-surrogate, the super-powered star of the book, inevitably constitutes a significant part of the appeal of the super-hero genre, at least in the beginning.

On their crudest, most obvious level, then, super-hero comics are fantasies of being powerful enough to be invulnerable to intimidation. Unfortunately, for too many of the immature readers, these basically healthy and optimistic fantasies, which essentially involve nothing more than a form of psychological self-defense and assertion in the face of injustice and oprpession, appeal only when they go much further, catering to the reader's more aggressive, sadistic fantasies of not only possessing enough power to neutralize evil-doers who threaten him or

those he wishes to protect, but of forcibly demonstrating his superiority to everyone else by flattening anyone who gets in his way, bolstering his own ego by incessant exhibitions of machismo on a grand scale.

It is precisely this kind of overkill and emphasis on unmotivated action [read violence] for its own sake that female readers are most likely to be "either indifferent or negative toward" [in Kalish's words]. However aggressive an individual girl or woman's own personality may bem as a female, she has typically been conditioned since childhood to feel revulsion for the very same violent, macho ideals that are so carefully instilled into little boys—if not by their parents and teachers, then by the culture at large, with its emphasis on male participation in sports and tough-guy heroics.

This is not to say that women cannot relate to the underlying fantasy of freedom from intimidation—only that, unlike many men, women tend to be repelled rather than attracted by the accompanying element of gratuitous violence for its own sake that is so often included as icing on the cake of the basic vision of autonomy and self-assertion through super-powers. Since the average woman is smaller and weaker than the average man, women, like children, have obvious incentives to daydream about some ideal state in which they would be rendered miraculously immune to potential attacks from muggers, rapists, or even those obnoxious guys who stand around on street corners making lewd remarks about the physical attributes of every female within earshot. However, most women have traditionally tended to be too inhibited by their early training, which conditions them to believe that even thinking about physical strength or fighting—even in self-defense—is both unnaturally bloodthirsty and dangerously unfeminine, to feel comfortable with super-hero-type fight-fire-with-fire fantasies inspired by this.

As suggested above, this feeling is exacerbated by the—to women—pointlessness of much of the violent action in so many super-hero comics, so many of whose fight scenes seem to serve no other purpose than proving at tedious length that the hero is more macho than anyone else. If women allow themselves to become interested in power at all—and "if" is the operative word, as will be explained later in this article—they tend to be satisfied with simply knowing that the power is there and available to be called upon if it is genuinely necessary. In this they are unlike those apparently numerous male readers [and comics creators] who feel the need to see the protagonist's sheer raw power demonstrated over and over again on every page of the book.

It follows logically from this that, despite their apparent preference for scenes dealing with characterization and personal relationships, female comics fans appear to have greater tolerance for fight scenes that spring from what they consider more justifiable motives, such as a hero's anger at the murder of his wife. When, as occasionally [though rather rarely] happens, an action sequence taps into specifically female fears and fantasies, rather than the more usual essentially male-oriented ones, women readers may actually become actively interested in them. This tendency is clearly demonstrated by the following excerpt from an LoC from Jana C. Hollingsworth printed in **MS. MARVEL #5**: "... how can you have a feminist super-heroine without sometime having a scene where she beats up, in her civilian I.D., a mugger/rapist in a dark alley. I know it

sounds like a cliche, but it hasn't actually been done that often, and it's a tremendous power fantasy."

This particular type of power fantasy, which might be labeled "the anti-rape fantasy," essentially deals with the female equivalent of the male anxieties spelled out in the aforementioned ad about the "too skinny" guy whose respect for himself as a human being and as a man [especially the latter] is violated by his public humiliation by bullies at the beach. The appeal of fantasies in which a heroine successfully defends herself against the overtly sexual humiliation of rape, whose destructive effect on a woman's ego is analogous to that experienced by the man forced to accept the shameful role of the impotent victim of sand-kicking creeps, is not confined to just the one female fan cited above. That the anti-rape fantasy has a somewhat wider appeal to women in general may be inferred from the presence of not one, but two, such scenes in what is apparently the only published story by Naomi Basner, one of Marvel's occasional temporary, pre-Jo Duffy female scripters, who wrote the Clea back-up story in **DEFENDERS #53** [Nov. '77]. In this tale, Clea confronts a mystically-powered assailant called Nicodemus who attacks her on two separate occasions, first as a mere mugger and later as a would-be rapist.

At the beginning of the story, Nicodemus, posing as an ordinary mugger, pounces out at Clea, who has been walking through Central Park alone at night [thereby violating rule one from the police list of things not to do if you want to avoid rape]. When the knife-wielding Nicodemus demands, "Okay, laday, let's have all your valuable—or I'm gonna have to cut you!", Clea easily defeats this purely material threat with a magical counterattack. Lulled into a false sense of security by this easy triumph, she is caught off guard moments later by an unexpected mystic assault from Nicodemus, who turns out to be a minor magician out to amass enough power to challenge Dr. Strange by means of stealing other adepts' mystical knowledge. Once he has transported Clea to his hideout and successfully drained her of her magical powers, Nicodemus announces that, though his prisoner has now outlived her original role in his plan, "At the very least, you'd make an excellent hostage—but I can think of a much better function for you—a much more pleasant one!" "Please. . . don't. . ." gasps the now-powerless Clea, as Nicodemus puts his arms around her. "You're in no position to argue, little one!" the villain replies smugly, not noticing that Clea is reaching behind her to pick up a small but heavy statuette from a table. A moment later, she has bashed him over the head with it. The last panel shows the uncharacteristically resourceful mystic maid summoning Doctor Strange by telephone as her erstwhile attacker lies unconscious in the foreground.

The related fantasy of successful defense against more small-scale sexual harassment has a similar special interest for women. I can remember being quite struck by a scene of this sort in the Superman-Batman team-up in **SUPERMAN #279** [Sept. '74], scripted by Elliot S. Maggin. Barbara [Batgirl] Gordon, stopping in at the GBS offices on a visit to Metropolis, encounters Steve Lombard in the corridor and politely asks for directions to Clark Kent's office. Ever the pushy playboy, Lombard replies, "Clarkie? He's the third door on the left—but what's a cute chick like you want with that clod when you have Steve Lombard to play with?" "Maybe I think **he** is cute!" Barbara retorts. "Now if you'll excuse me—" "Hold it, 'Sunset'! I didn't catch your name!" Lombard persists, grabbing her hand

and putting his other hand on her shoulder. Losing her temper, Barbara uses her Batgirl expertise in the martial arts to flip her obnoxious would-be suitor over her shoulder, then walks off, leaving Steve sprawled on the floor, thinking, "Whew! For a meek guy, Clark sure seems to have a lot of tough friends!" [p. 8].

Naturally, this kind of response would be a childish over-reaction in real life, but it can be quite cathartic to see someone actually get away with it if one has had frustrating firsthand experience with Lombard-type boors, who are virtually impossible to get rid of gracefully—or any other way, short of simply trying to ignore them until they finally get bored and go away. The kind of frustration this sort of thing can provoke in women is rather effectively explained by guest-scripter Samuel R. Delany in **WONDER WOMAN #203** [Nov.-Dec. '72], the otherwise embarrassingly off-target "Special Women's Lib Issue" [complete with an exploitative "good girl art" cover of Wonder Woman racing to help her bound

and gagged friend Cathy, whom the cover artist has portrayed with her back improbably arched, the better to draw the viewer's attention to her equally improbable bosom].

The splash page of this story shows a tense-looking Diana Prince walking down a street, followed by six men, all spouting offensively personal comments: "Hey, ain't that a pretty one!" "I'd like to put that one in my stable!" "Wow! What a stuck-up dame! Who does she think she is!" "You think you're something, huh, sweetheart? But I'd like to put you in your place!" "Here we go again!" Diana thinks. "If I smile and try to be a good sport, they

follow me and come on stronger! If I ignore them and walk on by, I get—static!" As the caption points out, "Diana Prince has a problem this night! And how many women get by without having to deal with this dilemma? What would you do? Diana Prince has other things on her mind this evening. . . but when a problem presents itself as often as this. . . what **can** you do?. . . but face it!"

The way Delany has Diana "face" the problem would probably seem alarmingly imprudent to any real woman who was being hassled by six obviously aggressive sidewalk "admirers," or even one—especially if the woman in question happened not to be a trained super-heroine who, though temporarily deprived of her super-human strength by the Amazon's departure from earth, was still an indisputable master of every imaginable form of the martial arts. In real life, the lecture on showing proper respect for the sensibilities of female passers-by that Diana angrily gives her tormentors would be likely to provoke the entire gang to the kind of overtly threatening behavior displayed by Mike, one of the ringleaders, who responds by snarling, "Who does this uppity dame think she is! I'll show—" In the comic, however, the irate Mike is immediately restrained by his fellow hecklers, who, in Delany's rather improbable version of young-punk behavior, have been shamed into repentance by Diana's outburst.

But however counterproductive her confrontational approach might prove in reality, Diana's speech does sum up the situation of a woman pestered by persistent wolves rather succinctly: "Okay, there's six of you and one of me! But I'm not a side of beef! If you thought you'd get anywhere coming on like that, there'd be an excuse! But you don't think you will any more than I do!" When one of her unwanted followers whines, "We were just havin' some [fun]," "Well, it's no fun for me!" Diana retorts, in an angry understatement which many women faced with the same problem must have been tempted to utter at one time or another.

As we have seen, certain kinds of fantasies of physical power may be of greater interest to women on the obvious literal level than one would expect from the results of studies that talk about women's gender-specific indifference or distaste for action. However, the power embodied by the protagonists of super-hero comics can also function on a less literal level, serving as a vehicle for the readers' more generalized daydreams of achievement and recognition, as well as their specific fantasies of freedom from physical intimidation [and the fantasies of physically intimidating others that these too often degenerate into]. As is suggested by Chris Claremont's remark in **COMICS FEATURE #4** [p. 17] about the young Cyclops and Phoenix's powers "acting as a 'metaphor' for the careers and potential for independent action" they would attain as they matured, super-powers can stand for any kind of talent, ability, or expertise that distinguishes someone from the average in a positive way and gives him or her the potential for significant accomplishment visible to the world at large. Thus, super-hero comics deal on a symbolic as well as a literal level with the problems involved in striving toward the goals of concrete achievement and active participation in society.

This kind of concrete achievement and active participation has traditionally been reserved for men and denied to women, who were thought to be destined for the more private, passive sphere of the home—for being, rather than for doing. Perhaps it is not so much the violence of super-hero comics as the fact that at the most basic level, they are about doing, about asserting oneself and acting to do what is right or necessary, against others' wishes if need be, that has discouraged women from becoming interested in them, since they thus embody what women have been taught to perceive as the essentially male domain of action—any kind of action, violent or otherwise.

"Nice" women—the only kind a decent super-hero [or his male fans] would associate with voluntarily—have traditionally been expected to eschew all interest in anything as coarse, vulgar, and masculine as power, whether it was the power to leap tall buildings at a single bound, or simply the power

I'VE COME A LONG WAY SINCE MY MARVEL GIRL DAYS, SCOTT. I'M POWERFUL, I'M INDEPENDENT, I'M A COMPLETE WOMAN. AND I'M STILL YOUNG!
I TALKED TO CHRIS, YOU'RE NOT GOING TO GET ANY OLDER!
YOU MEAN I'M IMMORTAL TOO!
NO! YOU'RE DEAD!

to think for themselves instead of meekly accepting some male authority's opinions. Those women who did not conform to this stereotype risked being considered destructive, castrating bitches—a fate which still all too frequently befalls super-heroines who insist on exercising their powers as vigorously as male heroes do, especially if those powers amount to anything more formidable than the ability to shrink or fade away into invisibility. [For a more detailed discussion of such heroines, especially Phoenix/Dark Phoenix and the She-Hulk, see my upcoming "Super-heroines as Chaos-Bringer" series in **COMICS FEATURE**.]

If fictional women who take action and exercise power effectively on their own initiative tend to be presented in a negative light even now, in comics and elsewhere, it should not be too surprising that many real women, brought up to aim for no success more visible to the world at large than providing emotional support to others in the seclusion of the private sphere, have difficulty relating to the idea of activity instead of passivity, and show little inclination to investigate a genre like super-hero comics, where public accomplishments and decisive action for the benefit of the entire community are central themes. It is difficult to identify with a powerful super-heroine [or hero] who saves the universe every issue if you've been brought up to believe that even expressing your own opinion too insistently is intolerably bossy, and that it is courting disaster to attempt to assert your own rights when others try to take advantage of you.

The noticeable increase in the number of female letterhacks sending LoCs [and "Dial 'H' for Hero" suggestions] to DC and Marvel in the last two or three years suggests that women who are teenagers now have less of a problem making this kind of identification with an actively heroic figure that their older sisters did fifteen, ten, or even five years ago, when there used to be just five or six names that appeared in lettercols over and over again—on the rare occasions when there was any sign of women at all. Obviously, the past decade and a half of feminist activism throughout society as a whole has had its effects—though, naturally enough, those effects are more visible in the attitudes of younger readers than those of the already grown-up, more set-in-their-ways comics creators. Perhaps, if we are lucky, by the time the children of today's fans are old enough to be interested, articles discussing why so few women read comics will be obsolete. ©

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CAPTAIN HEROIC & SIDE KICK IN DIAL 'H' FOR HEROIC!

CAPTAIN HEROIC AND SIDE KICK ARE BACK, IN WHAT HAS TO BE THEIR MOST **POPULATED** ADVENTURE YET! BEAR WITH US, PLEASE, AS WE PRESENT..

OUR STORY OPENS IN THE LUSH PENTHOUSE APARTMENT OF BRUCE (CAPTAIN HEROIC), CLARK AS.....

HEY, I THOUGHT THIS WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A LUSH PENTHOUSE APARTMENT! WHERE'S ALL THE EXPENSIVE FURNITURE & STUFF?

ITS A NEW INNOVATION THE PUBLISHER DECIDED TO TRY, BUZZ (SIDE KICK) BLAKE! THE READERS ARE SUPPOSED TO DESIGN OUR ADVERSARIES, WARDROBES, AND LIVING ROOM SETS, AND IN RETURN WE PRINT THEIR NAMES IN THE COMIC, THUS GIVING THEM EGO GRATIFICATION, AND US INCREDIBLE SALES. TROUBLE IS NOBODY SEEMS TO GET INTO DESIGNING COUCHES AND END TABLES. ALL WE'VE GOT SO FAR IS A BLACK-AND-WHITE T.V. AND A POTTED PLANT!

MILLIE DEMOZEL FASHIONS

THE KINKS

CODE APPROVED

LIQUID Plumme

T.V. AND PLANT BY TOM LINEHAM (WHEREVER HE LIVES) WHO IS COINCIDENTALLY ENOUGH THE ARTIST!

BRUCE & BUZZ'S CLOTHES DESIGNED BY KURT BUSIEK, LEXINGTON, MA. WHO ALSO WROTE THE STORY.

LETTERED BY: MIKE KNAPP TAMPA, FL.

SUDDENLY.....

WHA? DONT TELL ME THE PLANT DOES THAT?

NO, ITS ANOTHER INNOVATION. THE CRIME CHIMES GO OFF WHENEVER THE PLOT SLOWS DOWN, ALLERTING US TO SOME ACT OF UNSPEAKABLE VILLAINY DIRECTLY, RATHER THAN FORCE THE WRITER TO THINK UP A SENSIBLE REASON FOR A FIGHT... BUT LETS GO, NOW, WE'VE GOT TO SPRING INTO ACTION AS..

CAPTAIN HEROIC & SIDE KICK!

BESIDES, IT GIVES US A CHANCE TO GET OUT OF THOSE TACKY READER-DESIGNED CLOTHES!

SOON...

THERE THEY ARE!

HEH HEH! NO BANK VAULT CAN STAND LONG AGAINST THE FANATIC FOUR!!

THE FANATIC FOUR CREATED BY STAN ANJACK N.Y. N.Y.

HOLD IT.. RIGHT THERE YOU THREE!

THREE? WHERE IS INEVETABLE GIRL?

WHY, RIGHT HERE, GREEDIE SWEETIE! IM....

OOPS, WRONG POWER. NOW, I'M PROTECTING US WITH MY INEVITABLE FORCE FIELD!

YOU CANT GET AT US NOW SO NYAAH NYAAH

GAKK! GASP! EEP!

TILT TILT

SIGH: HIT IT SIDE KICK!

HEE HEE! BOY AM I CONVENIENTLY STRONG! SOMEDAY, THE WRITER'LL HAVE TO GET AROUND TO EXPLAINING THIS!

ITS CLOMPERIN' TIME!

YOU--YOU ZONKED MY WIFE! WELL IF ITS A FIGHT YOU, WANT,,,, YOUVE GOT IT!

ONE OFF-PANEL FIGHT LATER....

HUNH?

YOULL...REGRET THIS, HEROIC FOR NOW THAT YOU'VE DEFEATED US YOU MUST FACE..... DR. GLOOM! UHHHHHHH

OH BOY, DID WE EVER GET CLOMPERED....

WHY DO WE HAVE TO DO THAT? I DONT SEE ANY LOGICAL CONNECTION!

NEVER MIND, SIDE KICK. HERE HE COMES!

GREETINGS CAPTAIN HEROIC! I AM DR. GLOOM! ONCE I WAS A PROMISING JEDI KNIGHT, BUT SEDUCED BY THE DARK SIDE OF THE FORCE, I...

Script

WAIT! WHAT AM I SAYING?

QUICKLY SIDE-KICK WHILE HE'S CONFUSED!

POW

NOW, WE'RE RID OF HIM...

WATCH WHERE YOURE GOING YOU BIG LUG! YOU ALMOST SQUISHED ME

WHA? WHO SAID THAT?

I DID..

I, THE BEE! AND I WANT YOU TO MEET HUNK, TOO. HE'S MY HONEY, BETTER KNOWN AS.....

GIGANT MAN!

GUILTY

GUESS WHO

SIDE KICK...

RIGHT, C.H.!

THIS IS NOT A WORD BALLOON

GOOZAHA!

UK. YUK

POW!

IM. BEGINNING TO GET TIRED OF THIS PLOTLINE

SQUISH!

I LIKE IT! LOTSA VIOLENCE! HEY, WHO'S THIS?

I AM MAGNEATO! OR MAGNETTO.... I NEVER CAN REMEMBER WHICH

ITS PRONOUNCED MAGNAH-TOE!

SHUT-UP, WART

HEAVY

CHEVY

I AM NOT BOBA FETT

MAG-WHATEVER-O BY STAN ANJACK N.Y.

ANYWAY, I AM THE NEXT STEP IN HUMANITYS EVOLUTION, THUS MAKING ME BETTER THAN ALL HUMANS,

CHEVY

POMP!

AND DESTINED TO RULE THIS PLANET THRU..

DARWINIAN SELECTION....

NOT MUCH OF A SUPER POWER DARWINIAN SELECTION!

HEY, LOOK! MORE OF 'EM! AND WE HAVENT EVEN BEATEN THIS GUY UPYET!

ITS THE YES-MEN!

RIGHT! WE'RE EVOLUTIONARILY SUPERIOR, TOO, BUT IF YOU THINK WE'RE GOING TO TELL ORDINARY HUMANS THAT, YOU'RE CRAZY, THEY'D EXTERMINATE US!

ANGRY MOB

DOWN WITH MUTANTS

DIE YOU GRAVY SUCKING PIGS!

NO MORE MUTIES

NO, SIR! WERE NOT SUPERIOR BEINGS! WERE SLIMY MUTIES IS ALL!

DONT KILL US, PLEASE!

THE YES-MEN BY STAN ANJACK

17½ MINUTES LATER

THOSE GUYS PUT UP ONE HECK OF A FIGHT! ESPECIALLY THAT ANGRY MOB!

YEAH, I WONDER WHO WE GET TO TRASH NEXT?

SLURP

FREE SLUSH

OH, GROOV

ISNT 14 ENOUGH FOR ONE ISSUE?

HEAVY

APPARENTLY NOT, AS YOULL SEE ON THE NEXT PAGE, CAPTAIN.

HALT, IN THE PRESENCE OF THE NON-HUMANS!

CAUSE YOU ASKED FER IT!

SAY, LOOKIT THIS!

WITH OUR LEADER BLACK BOOT WE...

THE NON-HUMANS CREATED BY STAN ANJACK N.Y. N.Y.

HEY, COME BACK HERE!

NOT A THOUGHT ALLOON

C'MON SIDE KICK WE'RE LEAVING

NON HUMANS BY STAN ANJACK

A FLOCK OF V's

HOW HIGH THE MC

IVE HAD ENOUGH OF THOSE NEVER ENDING CRAZIES!

GEE CAP, I NOTICED SOMETHING BACK THERE! ALL THOSE GOONS WERE CREATED BY THIS GUY

THE NON CREATED BY

THEN... I KNOW HOW TO STEM THE TIDE OF SUPER FOES... ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS.....

LATER....

SO THIS IS NEW YORK! BUT HOW DO WE FIND ONE GUY IN ALL THIS?

OFF

HEY! OVER THERE! THAT GUY WITH THE CIGAR AND THE "I DIALED 'H' FOR HEROIC" T-SHIRT! HE MUST BE THE ONE!

I ♥ NY

O.K. I'LL TAKE CARE OF THIS

ARE YOU STAN ANJACK?

EXCELSIOR, TIGER!

FACE FRONT!

WHAM! BAM! SMAK! WHAMP!

OK, LETS GO

REALLY SIDE-KICK SOMETIMES I THINK YOU GET TO ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT YOUR WORK

BACK IN MEGALOPOLIS..

CROSSTOWN BUS

WELCOME TO Megalopis MAIN

WELL, WE DID IT! WE WONT BE BOTHERED BY THOSE INTERMINABLE SUPER-MENACES FROM NOW ON!

MAIL

I ♥ NY

ME

WHA? WHY IS THE GROUND SHAKING? WHAT'S THAT NOISE?

RRRUMBLE

CAP! LOOK!

PLEASE SHAKE THIS PAGE VIGOROUSLY

OH NO! WE ONLY KILLED HALF OF HIM! AND IT WAS THE WRONG HALF!!!

MUMSY GO BOY

BING BONG

OMINOUS AIN'T I!

INSERT FACE HERE

ZZZ ZZZZ

NEXT: IF THEY SURVIVE THIS, CAPTAIN HEROIC & SIDE KICK WILL DAZZLE YOU WITH HOW TRENDY, WITH IT, & SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS THEY ARE, AS THEY MEET MS. METEOR, THE SUPERHEROINE CREATED BY A WOMAN! SEE YOU THEN, ERA BOOSTERS

KURT OLSSON

"THE KING AND I"

A look at Jack Kirby's 1970's Marvel Work

Since the Puritans landed in the New World with their dream of building a "New Jerusalem," Americans have considered themselves a chosen people. This feeling of being something new and special and the need to spread this feeling explains, in part, why the personal narrative not only has played an important role in American Literature but also has been instrumental in shaping the thoughts and values by which the American people have come to live over the past three centuries.

The Puritans, believing themselves to be God's chosen, used the personal narrative to share their spiritual experiences and to show others what the Puritans considered a "better way." The Puritan writers went beyond pure religious didacticism, though; they also wrote autobiographically to reflect upon and think through their own beliefs and actions.

In that spirit, I wish to make this column a place where I can share my experiences and feelings about comics through the power of the personal essay. Although I hope to never feel the urge to don the robes of the savant bent on revealing a "better way," I do want to let readers see the inner workings of another comic book reader's mind. While reading the opinions I have formed about comics (and the manner in which I came to those opinions), readers may find themselves reflecting upon their own comics philosophy and maybe—just maybe—will come to a better understanding of just why they enjoy the medium.

As the opening of this column shows, the Puritan influence on our culture is still very strong, especially—as in my case—when places like Salem are a short drive away. Likewise, reading comics for any amount of time shows one the great effect Jack "King" Kirby's artwork has had on comics. While no one questions Kirby's influence on today's comics artists, the value of the work he has done in the past decade as both writer and artist has been hotly debated. Over the past six years, I have found myself on both sides of that debate.

Six years ago, I, like many older readers, found Kirby's latest work (on books like **CAPTAIN AMERICA** and **THE BLACK PANTHER**) very hard to swallow. Having started reading comics at the time when Kirby jumped back to Marvel after his hiatus with DC, I was very disappointed when I read the first few issues of his stint as writer/artist on **CAPTAIN AMERICA**. In my eyes, his work on that title just did not live up to the awesome accolades the Bullpen Bulletins (yes, I admit once getting most of my comics information from those hallowed pages) had laid upon him when his return was first announced by Marvel.

I felt Kirby's writing was abominable. Not only did his writing style, with its bombastic captions and simplistic dialogue, exemplify what I considered comics writing's worst faults, but Kirby even veered away from the complex rendering which Steve Englehart had given Captain America and Steve Rogers, with the **"Nomad"** story-line. I had gotten into comics right at the end of Englehart's tenure on the title, and thought that Englehart's attempt at making Captain America a three-dimensional, and therefore more realistic, character was the direction the writer should continue to take. Instead, Kirby took over the writing chores and returned Captain America to the symbol many writers had portrayed him to be, rather than a flesh and blood character. With this change from Englehart's approach, I felt that Kirby was shunning a more adult approach, was ignoring the full complexities of human drama, and was making **CAP-**

TAIN AMERICA a childish comic book. In the Spring of 1976, this feeling depressed me, especially since Cap's 200th issue [cover dated July, 1976, no less] would be written and drawn by Kirby.

Because his approach did not fit what I thought a super-hero comic should try to accomplish, I didn't enjoy Kirby's super-hero work. In the super-hero comics I read, I wanted as close as you could come to realism. Kirby couldn't give that to me in his super-hero work on **CAPTAIN AMERICA** and **THE BLACK PANTHER**, but Kirby in a universe of his own creation—such as the world of **THE ETERNALS**—didn't bother me. Here, I could see Kirby's awesome imagination at work. As long as there was no attachment to the Marvel super-hero universe, I could take Kirby's work—at least, in small dosages.

I might have been able to take Kirby's writing in larger dosages, too, if I hadn't been so disappointed by his artwork. After picking up my first issue of a Kirby comic and looking at the artwork's angular style and bizarre squiggles seemingly splashed anywhere, I felt—as a friend so aptly put it later—as if I were looking at comics done by a first-grade finger-painter. This artwork was done by **the** comics artist, **the** master storyteller? Jack Kirby must have lost something, I thought, after putting down **CAPTAIN AMERICA #199**.

I picked up the latest issue of **SUPERBOY AND THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES** after that, and I remember having a very hard time figuring out why Kirby was being lauded as **the** comics master when an artist like **"The Legion"** 's Mike Grell, with a style more faithful to a realistic approach, should be receiving the honors. Of course, even then, I realize artists like Grell, Buckler, and Nasser owed their style to Neal Adams, but at least they tried to make their artwork look sophisticated. Their artwork was detailed and pretty, and I didn't feel as embarrassed telling someone I read comics when I could show them the realistic work of someone like Grell. On the other hand, I never wanted to show anyone Kirby's artwork, because his stuff looked like [ugh] "comic book art"—the same crude, cartoony stuff which kept me from even looking at a comic until I happened to discover them at the age of fourteen.

Discovering comics at such a relatively late age is the reason, I think, I immediately took such a passionate dislike to Kirby [a dislike so strong that I went so far as to jump up and down on my bed when I read that Kirby was leaving **CAPTAIN AMERICA**]. Since I knew no one else who still read comics when I began reading them, I felt embarrassed about the enjoyment I derived from them. Kirby, with what I considered his primitive and crude approach to comics, did not represent the mature direction I wanted comics to take.

SAY THAT AGAIN... YOU KNOW... THE PART ABOUT "I LOVE YOU, BABY!"
NOW LOOK, DONNA MARIA ... THIS IS NOT A MOONLIT PARK, AND WE'RE NOT OUT FOR A STROLL!
LET'S GET OUTTA HERE
A

Kirby's *CAPTAIN AMERICA*: A more one-dimensional character than Steve Englehart's version, more of a symbol under Kirby.

Other artists and writers fitted into this same pattern. Ditko, Fox and Schaffenberger must have been the type of comics creators the store owner was thinking about when he called them "funny books" at the newstand I frequented. Since Kirby wrote and drew his stories, though, he instead of the others, came to represent in my mind all that I felt was wrong with comics. Kirby **was** the crude, cartoony stuff which had kept me from even looking at a comic for all those years.

Things have changed, though, in the past six years. I have grown older and no longer feel so insecure about my love for the medium. With this confidence I have also allowed myself the chance to come to at least some sort of understanding, if not admiration, for what Kirby has tried to do as writer/artist in the past decade.

Kirby has always been described as a master storyteller, but in my first few years of comics buying, this facet of the comics form meant beans to me. The illustrative touch, with its delicate feathering and faithfulness to realism, was that by which I measured the worth of an artist. Now, after following a bumpy road, I have found that imaginative storytelling is the key to producing great comics, and Adams clones, such as Grell, Buckler, and Nasser, many times seem too concerned with the way the picture looks, rather than worried about the ease with which the readers' eyes move from panel to panel.

Kirby, on the other hand, seems to have intuitively understood the "secrets" of comics storytelling. His use of simple shapes to build the images in each panel is almost symbolic of his whole approach to comics in the past decade. Working with the bare bones of his craft, Kirby has polished his artwork so that its primitive style works

for—rather than against—the powerful dynamics of his panels and almost makes palpable the emotions in play in the story. Look at any Kirby fight scene and you will see what I mean.

In like manner, Kirby's writing tries to accomplish the same goals his artwork does. Just as with his artwork, Kirby, in the last decade, has been trying to do something different. Again, the example of his and Englehart's work on **CAPTAIN AMERICA** comes into play. While I still believe the realistic approach Englehart brought to **CAPTAIN AMERICA** was the best for that character, I see now that Kirby's making Captain America into a one-dimensional symbol was done on purpose. Rather than work with the "realistic approach" which has become the vogue in this century, Kirby used—and probably will continue to use—an older approach to tell his stories. This approach is much like the tragedies of ancient Greece in that Kirby has used larger-than-life characters [such as Captain America] to symbolically show the grand power of human drama.

OH, STUPID SPRITE--! MONARCH OF MUDDLE-HEADS! YOU'VE SEEN TOO MUCH! THE FATE OF THE EARTH HAS BEEN THRUST INTO YOUR QUAKING LAP!
SOMETHING MUST BE DONE!

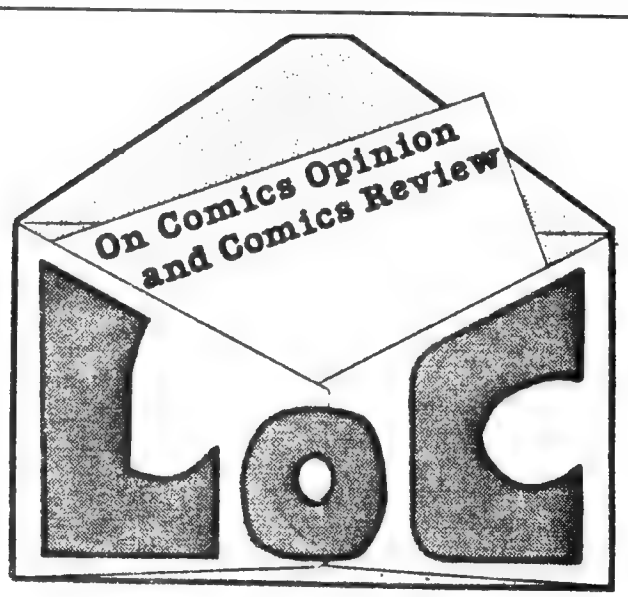
"Kirby in a universe of his own creation—such as the world of *THE ETERNALS*—didn't bother me. Here, I could see Kirby's awesome imagination at work."

In **CAPTAIN AMERICA #212**, Kirby's Captain America fights against The Red Skull even though he is blind—not for personal reasons, but because as a hero he is expected to fight the evils cursing mankind [represented here as the demoniac Red Skull]—at any cost. The battle of good versus evil on an epic scale is not what Englehart is after, though, in the issues when his Captain America fights against the Red Skull. When the Nomad becomes Cap again [#183], he is doing so because, as a person, he has finally come to grips with the heroic ideal he has tried to live by.

Both examples concern themselves with the hero in society, but in Englehart's issues, he is concerned with human drama on the microsmic level; he is interested in how Steve Rogers, the man, reacts to having the role of hero and symbol thrust upon him when he really doesn't want the responsibility, which the reader learns in his monologue at the end of **CAPTAIN AMERICA #183**. On the other hand, Kirby is interested in the macrocosm and how the hero, Captain America, lives up to the cosmic ideals of right.

I found this approach very hard to handle when I first began reading comics—and for a good number of years after that—because my idea of how comics should be more adult prevented me from really looking at his work and trying to grasp what he was accomplishing as a writer/artist. While I still feel comics should concern themselves with the details of human drama rather than work in general terms as Kirby has done, I see now that Kirby, too, is trying to approach comics maturely. No longer do I think that what Kirby has done as a writer/artist is a bad approach; I realize that this is just a different way at looking at the world around us.

And there's definitely nothing wrong with **that**.



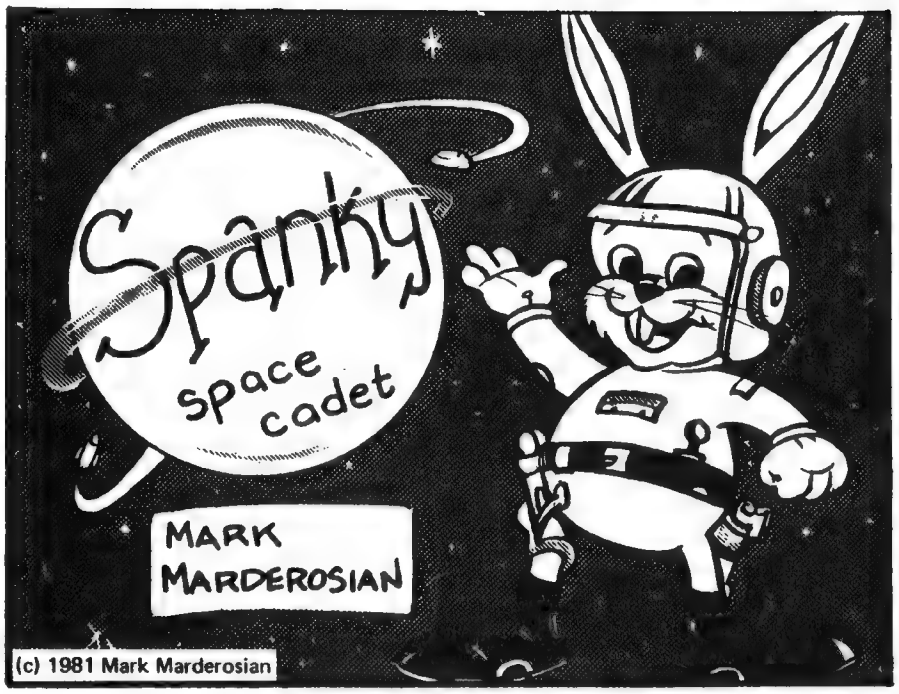
NEXT ISSUE

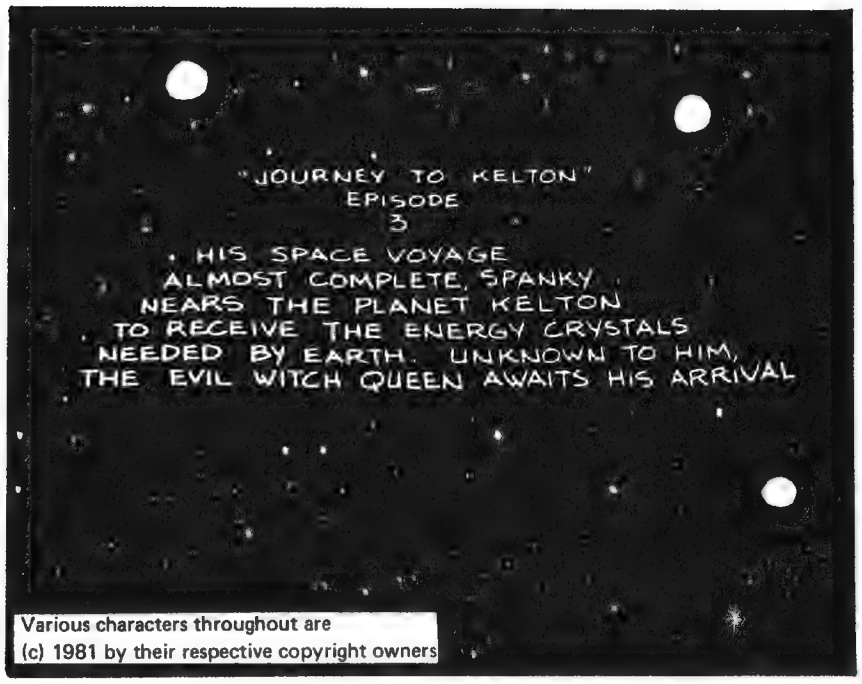
The conclusion of **PLAYING TAG WITH THE EAGLES** by Dwight Decker
SPANKY, SPACE CADET by Mark Marderosian
Pt. 2 Reflections in an Emerald Eye
Steed & Peel — British Girls Comics
Fandom's Forum Roundtable by Maggie Thompson

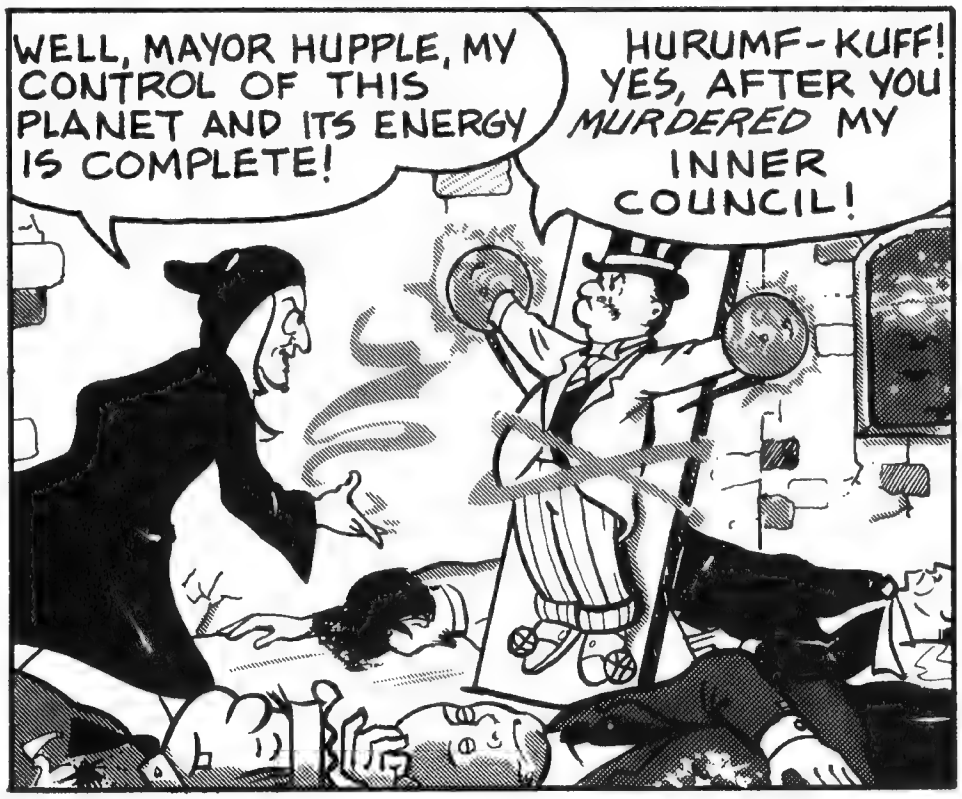
COMICS FEATURE

#18

Year in Review

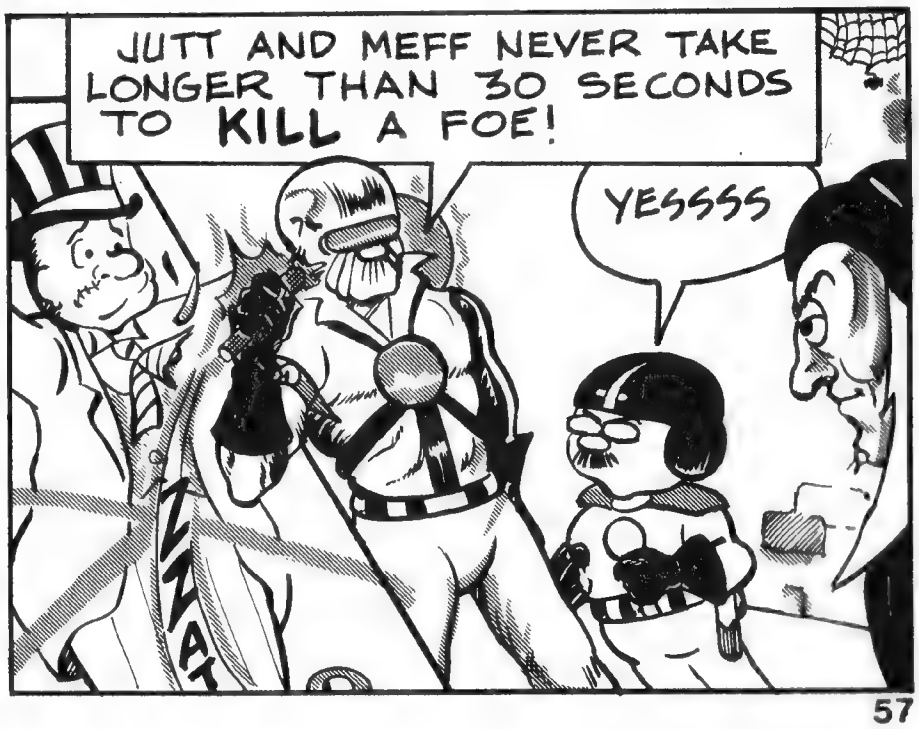

Spanky
space cadet
MARK MARDEROSIAN
(c) 1981 Mark Marderosian

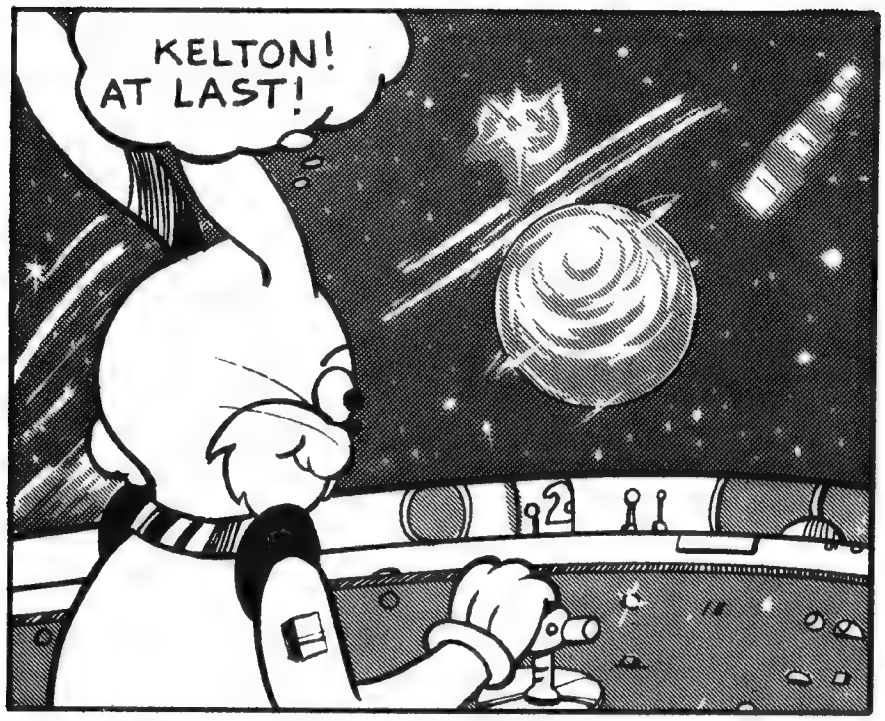

"JOURNEY TO KELTON"
EPISODE
3
HIS SPACE VOYAGE ALMOST COMPLETE, SPANKY NEARS THE PLANET KELTON TO RECEIVE THE ENERGY CRYSTALS NEEDED BY EARTH. UNKNOWN TO HIM, THE EVIL WITCH QUEEN AWAITS HIS ARRIVAL
Various characters throughout are (c) 1981 by their respective copyright owners


WELL, MAYOR HUPPLE, MY CONTROL OF THIS PLANET AND ITS ENERGY IS COMPLETE!
HURUMF-KUFF! YES, AFTER YOU *MURDERED* MY INNER COUNCIL!

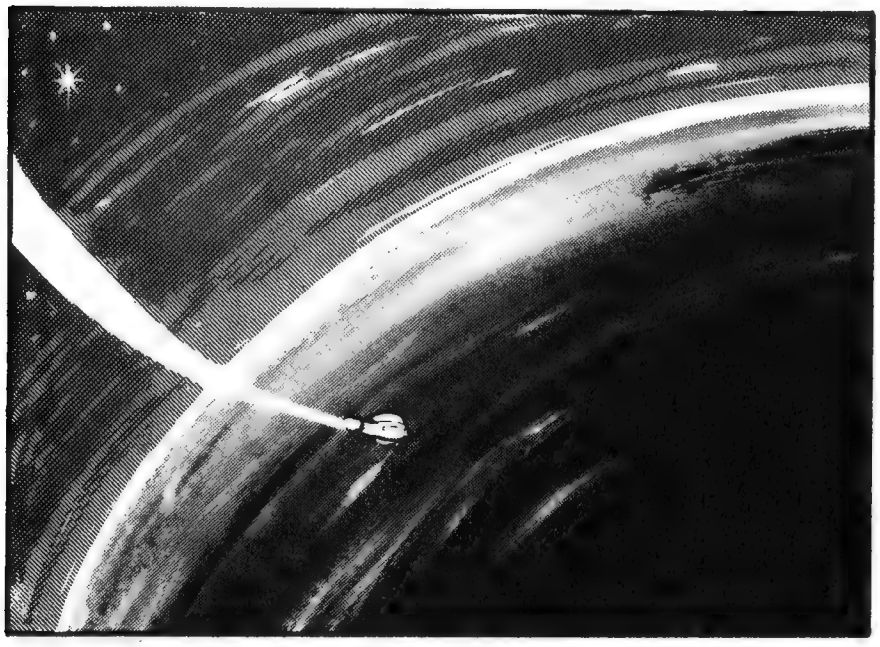
WHY, YOU WITCH, WHY?! WHO IS BEHIND YOUR NEW POWER?
FRIENDS... JUST FRIENDS
PUBLIC MESSAGE
MOGUL OIL

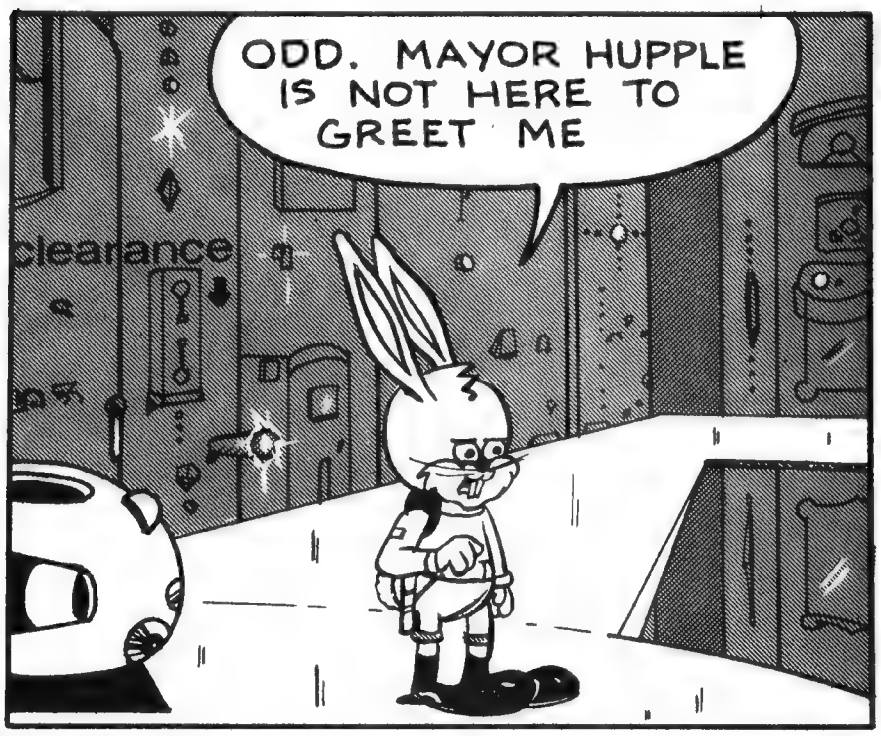
THERE IS A TREMOR IN THE FORCE! SPANKY IS WITHIN OUR GRAVATATIONAL FIELD! MAKE READY!
DO NOT WORRY MISTRESS...


JUTT AND MEFF NEVER TAKE LONGER THAN 30 SECONDS TO **KILL** A FOE!
YESSSS
WHAT

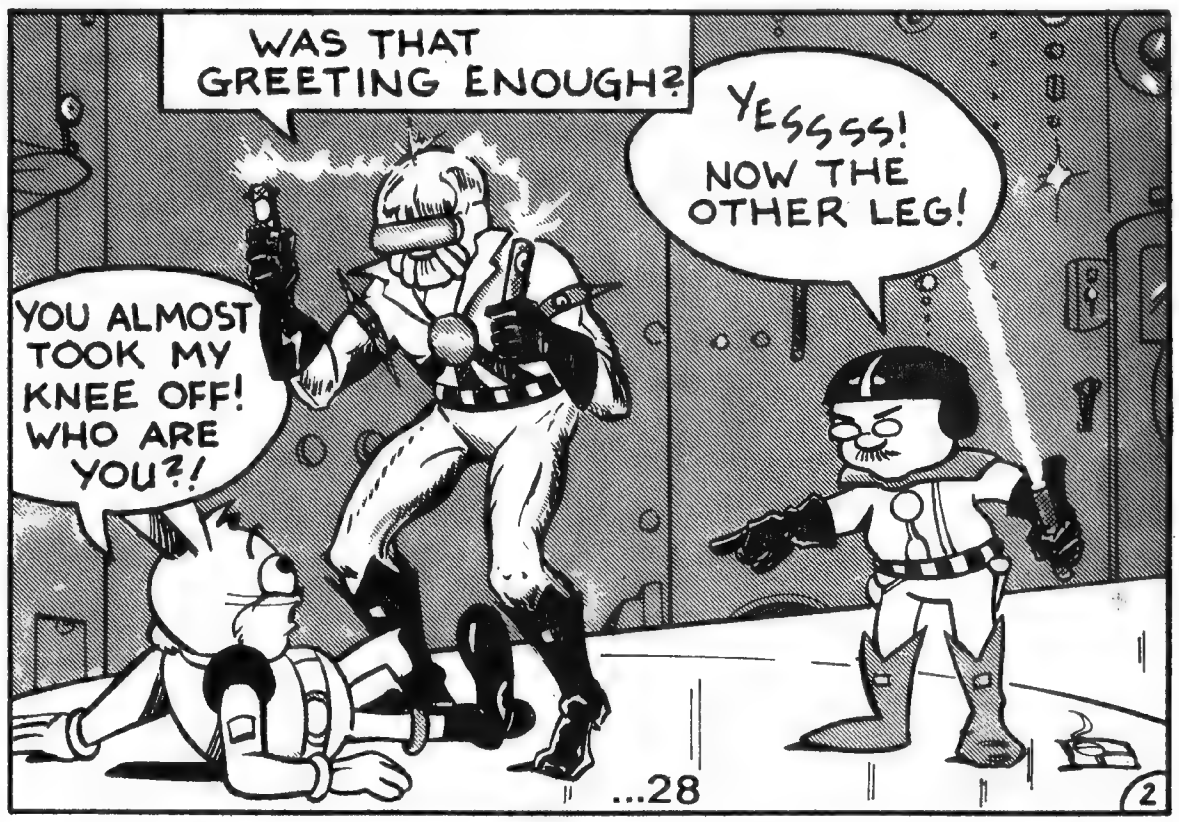

KELTON! AT LAST!

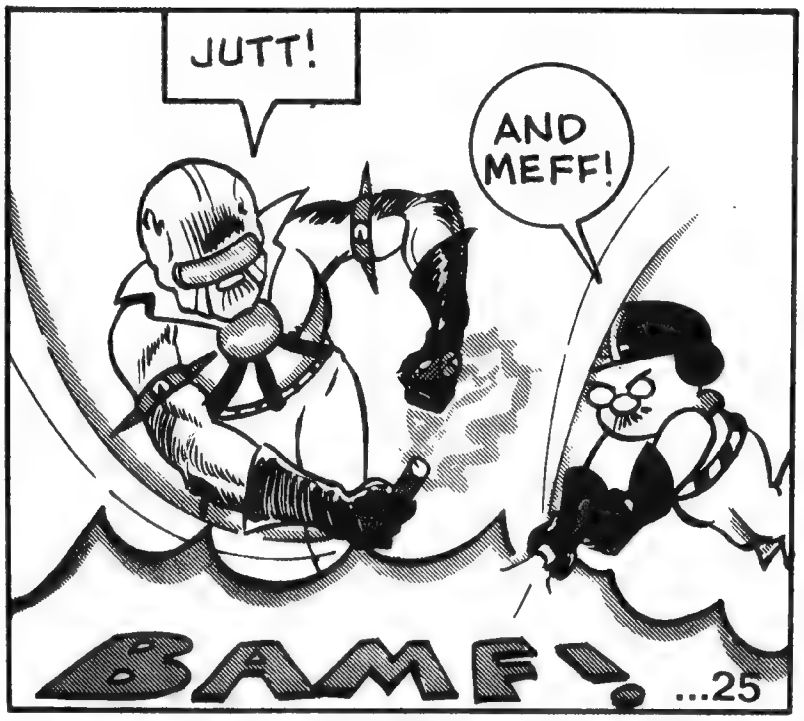
SOON, I'LL BE BACK ON EARTH WITH- STRANGE...SOMETHING IS DIFFERENT...OUT OF PLACE
OH WELL

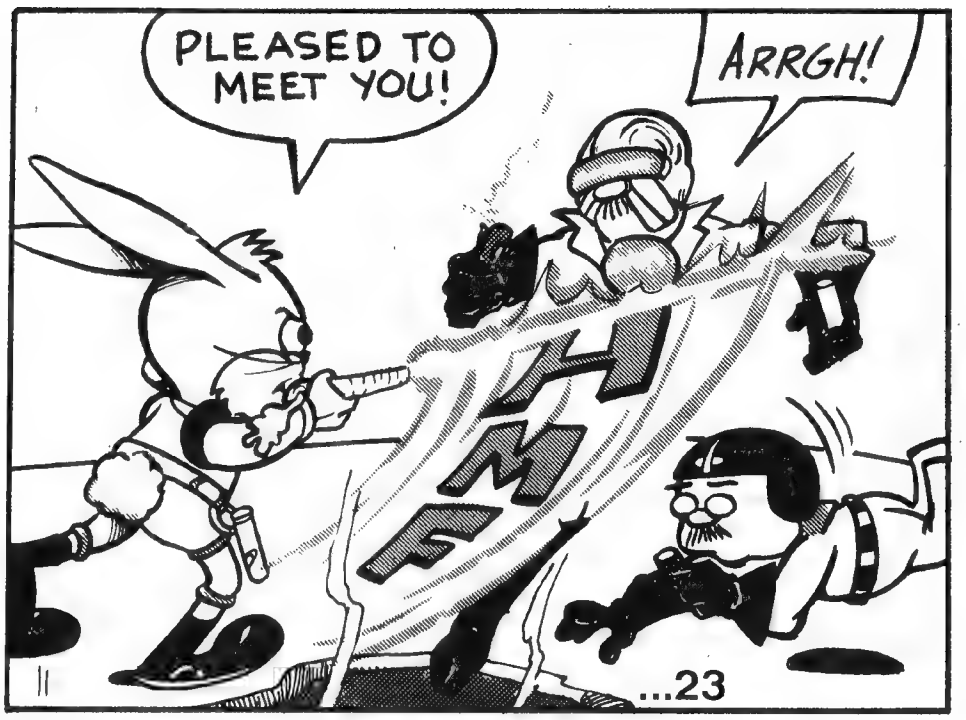


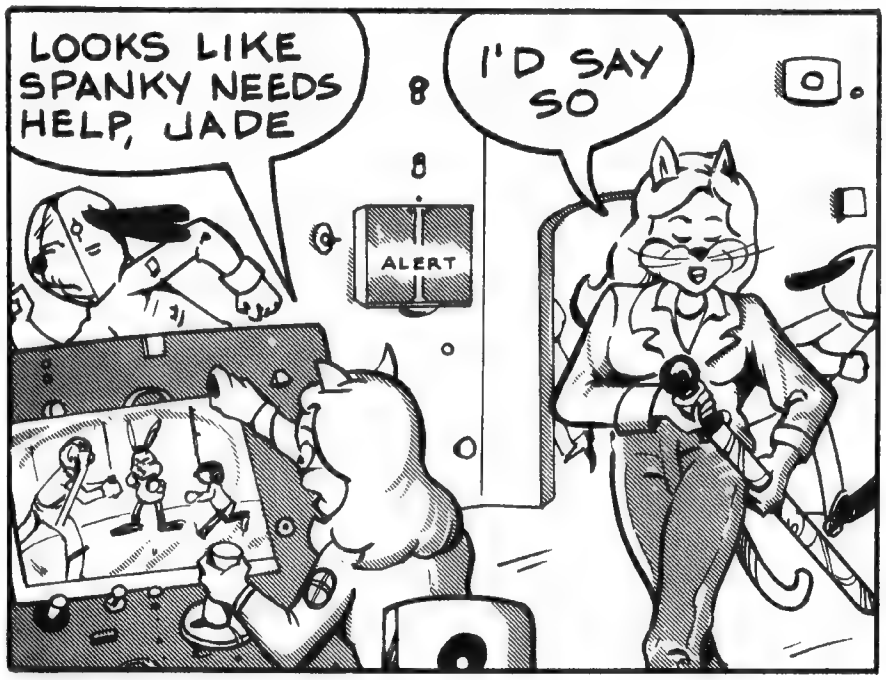

ODD. MAYOR HUPPLE IS NOT HERE TO GREET ME
clearance

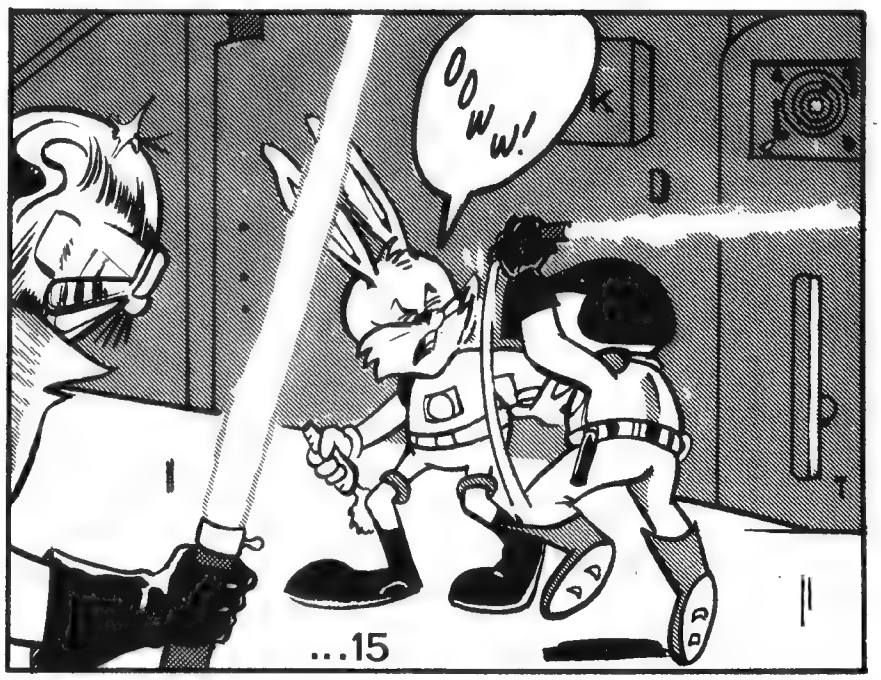
WHAK...

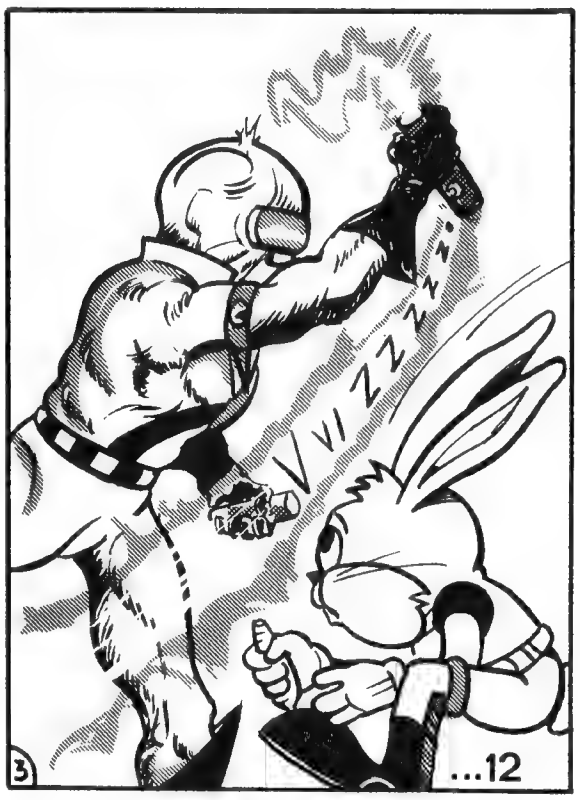

WAS THAT GREETING ENOUGH?
YESSSS! NOW THE OTHER LEG!
YOU ALMOST TOOK MY KNEE OFF! WHO ARE YOU?!
...28
2

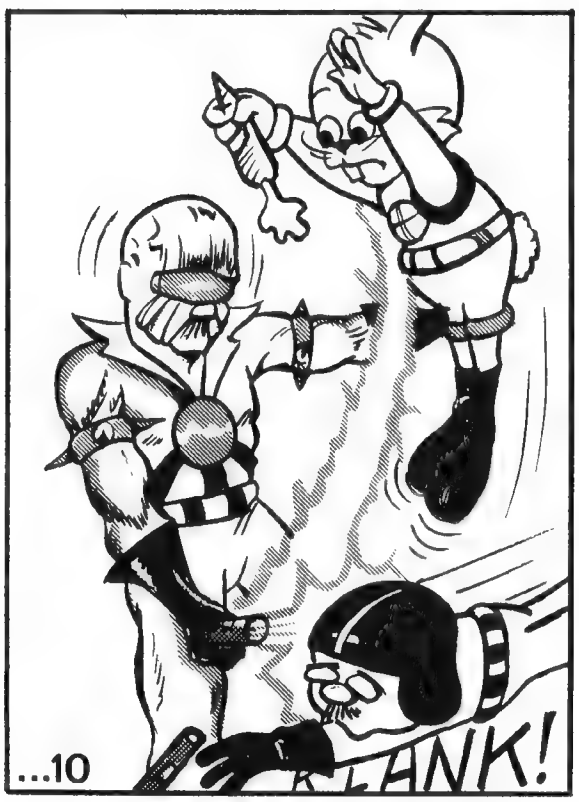

JUTT!
AND MEFF!
BAMF!
...25

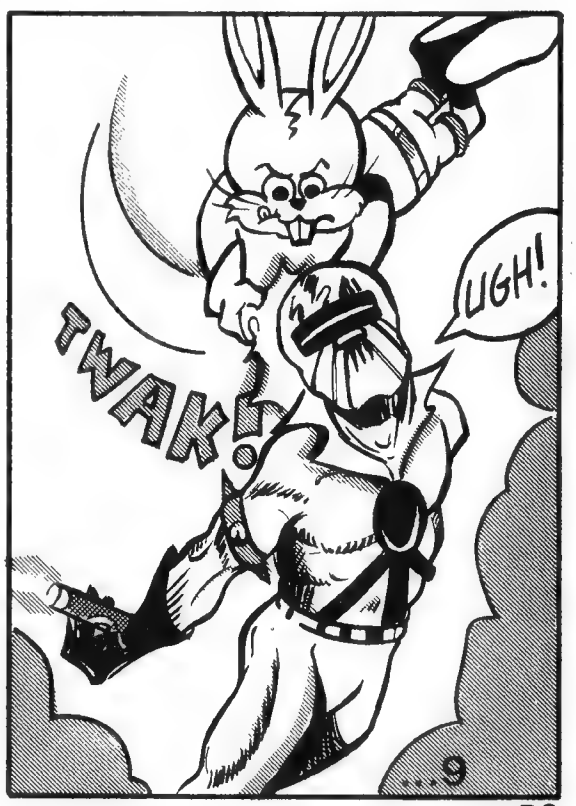

PLEASED TO MEET YOU!
ARRGH!
...23

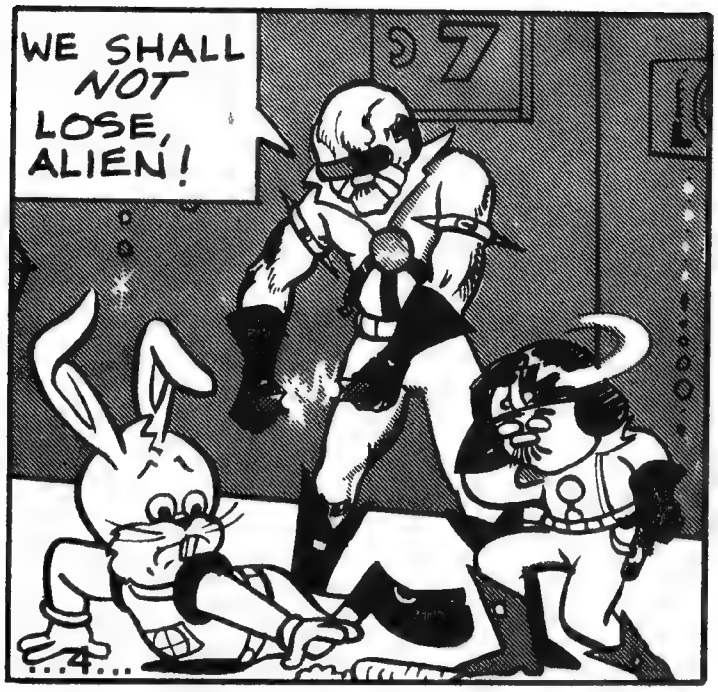

LOOKS LIKE SPANKY NEEDS HELP, JADE
I'D SAY SO
ALERT

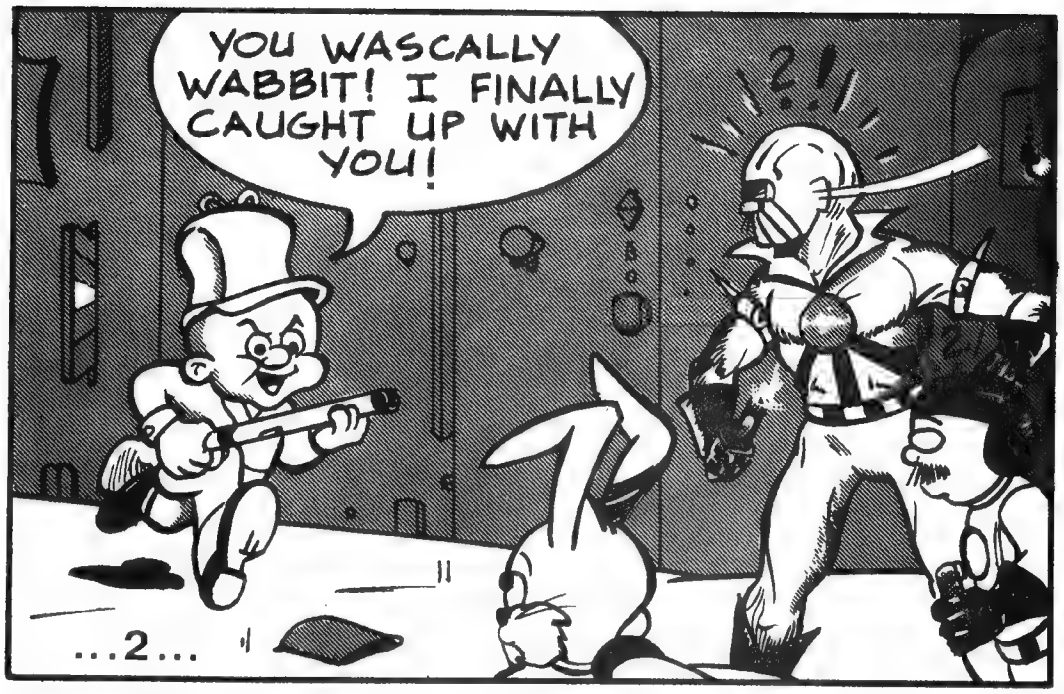

OOWW!
...15

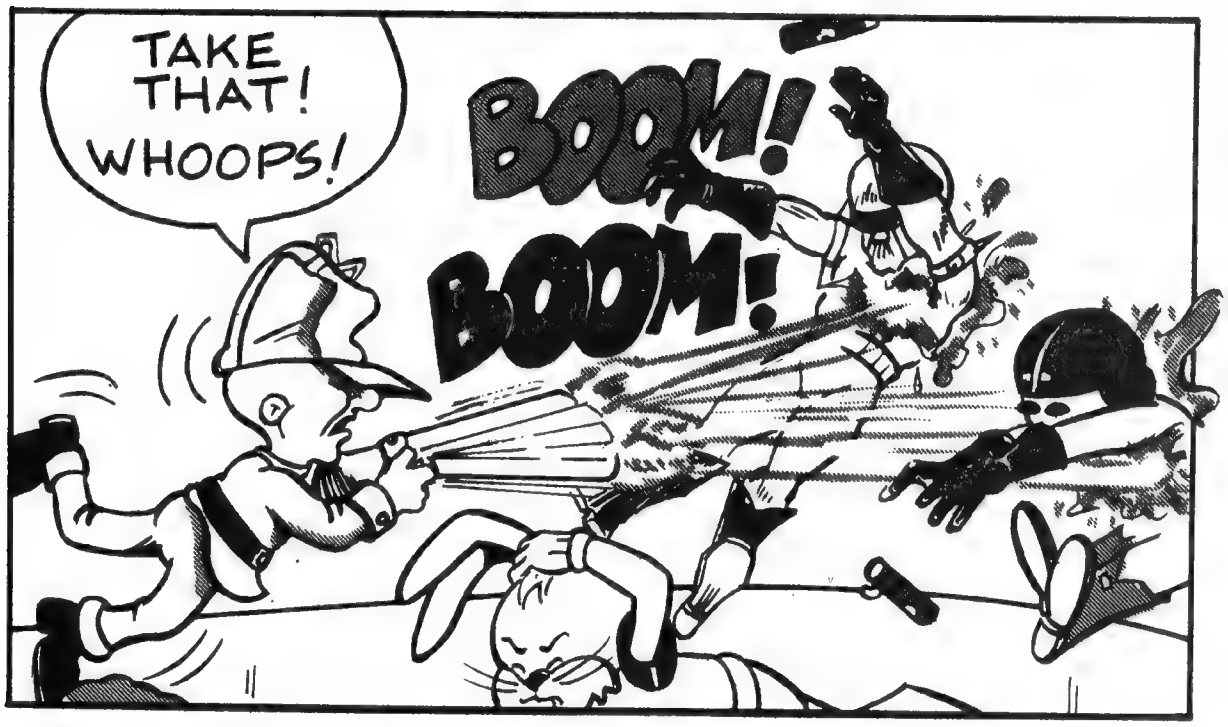

VVIZZZZ
...12


...10
KLANK!


TWAK!
UGH!
...9


WE SHALL NOT LOSE, ALIEN!
...4...


YOU WASCALLY WABBIT! I FINALLY CAUGHT UP WITH YOU!
...2...


TAKE THAT! WHOOPS!
BOOM!
BOOM!

GOSH! I APOLOGIZE!
DON'T WORRY. THE JUDGE WILL GO EASY

SPANKY, THAT WAS VERY MESSY WORK!
JADE TONIK!

AAAIEE! NOW I'LL HAVE TO HANDLE THIS MATTER MYSELF!!
NEXT: CONFRONTATION!

LOU MOUGIN "GOD AND MAN IN COMICS"

In comics of the 1940s and '50s, religion wsa largely ignored. In the 1960s, it began crawling out from under the carpet. In the 1970s, it came all the way out and was practically dragged through the mud.

Things are changing. With the departure of most intellectual writers from comics [such as Englehart, Gerber and Wolfman on **DRACULA**], belief is becoming less of a target. As critical as it may seem, one can't expect profound statements of faith or agnosticism from writers whose powers are strained to the utmost in pushing a hero and villain through time-worn fight cliches.

Still, a story such as Doug Moench's **THE MIRACLE OF STORMS** in **THOR #303**, with the thunder god aiding a Catholic priest, may indicate that balance is returning to the religious philosophies expressed in comics. Titles such as **ST. FRANCIS** and DC's Bible adaptation are flukes, but their very appearance in "establishment" comic lines, rather than in mainline Christian publihsing houses, indicates that conservative religion can still find an occasional nook in comicdom. **Moderate** faith is rare still, and it's doubtful that DC or Marvel will adapt the works of Robert Ingersoll, Bertrand Russell or Aldous Huxley.

The skepticism of the 1970s and the reverence of the 1960s both have their place in contemporary entertainment. What is lacking now is **balance**.

To begin: Cosmic Evil—any Devil you care to conjure up—is almost omnipresent in comic books. Pick up any "mystery" book for the past ten or so years and, as Dwight Decker recently noted in a **COSMICS JOURNAL** column, you'll find a host of sinners or at least less-than-true believers being undone in nasty mystical fashion. The message seems to be that, at least in the comics cosmos, the Devil is around every street corner in the felsh [or a reasonable facsimile thereof]. Moreover, he has a host of wiling disciples—witches, ogres, vampires, werewolves, zombines and a demon or two—just waiting for an excuse to clobber you. God, apparently, is neglecting His beat or taking kickbacks. Rare indeed is the presence of Cosmic Good noted in a comic. We've seen crosses used against vampires times without end, but does anybody remember why?

Frankly, the bases for these tales make for fairly effective drama but they don't hold up under even casual examination. If Satan is to be allowed powerful, superhuman agents on Earth, then where are God's opposite numbers? Has a priest ever become a super-hero by giving his soul to Yahweh? Well, no, but Johnny Blaze got some impressive powers while trafficking with Satan. Anyone who picks up a mystic tome in a Marvel or DC comic automatically gains mind-staggering power, often requiring the disciplinary actions of Dr. Strange or the Spectre. Why, then, can't a character gain incredibly counter-evil power from the Bible, the Koran, or any other "good" religious text? Spiritual evil would seem to require a spiritual avenger, but in almost all cases "secular" heroes have to clean the mess up. Demonic cults are presented as organizations of great and tangible power, but Christian or Jewish demonimations are shown as having little power at all—unless, of course, you need to borrow a cross or holy water to fend of Dracula. Clearly, something is missing here.

An old writers' handbook I once consulted [please don't ask for its name; I can't recall it!] admitted that godliness and ungodliness **can** indeed clash in good fashion, but ungodliness must come very close to winning. Well and good. But that's not the same

as denying godliness, its existence, or an equal place on stage. Most horror- or fantasy-fiction writers worth their salt give devilish villains opponents that can put up a good fight [or, perhaps, **the** "Good Fight"]. Stephen King, in **THE STAND**, granted awesome power to his villain Randall Flagg, but nothing less than a comsmic Hand appears in the end to wreak vengeance. C.S. Lewis, in his space trilogy [**OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET**, **PERELANDRA** and **THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH**] had a host of angels, Merlin, and a hero named Ransom to oppose Satan's minions. Tolkein saw that Gandalf possessed sorcery enough to counter Sauron's mightier serfs, and implied that good beings on a higher plane [i.e., Eru] opposed Sauron directly in **THE LORD OF THE RINGS**. And, of course, John Milton wasn't above bringing Christ onstage to confound Satan in **PARADISE LOST** and **PARADISE REGAINED**. If evil is to be allowed direct, active power, how can good be denied the same privilege?

Perhaps the problem lies with comics writers' own orientation. It is uncertain what religious belief various comic authors subscribe to; given the general tone of their writing, I would assume [and

YOU . . . YOU ARE A GOD . . . BUT THEN, IF YOU . . . AND NOT HIM . . . HAS MY FAITH BEEN RESTORED ONLY FOR ME TO FIND THAT IT HAS BEEN . . . MISPLACED?
THERE BE MANY GODS WORSHIPPED ON THIS EARTH, FATHER COZA, THROUGHOUT THIS UNIVERSE . . .

perhaps falsely so] that most are agnostics. Whether any actively subscribe to a religious code or not, most are guilty of borrowing piecemeal from religion without following through on their ideas [as we've seen in the last few installments]. Of course, this treatment isn't only visited on matters of the faith. Justice and law enforcement, for example, is only a matter of gaining super-powers and punching out the appropriate baddie who is always clearly identified and never allowed to cause too much damage or become part of the power structure. Nonetheless, it **is** inadequate.

Churches are not, as a rule, staffed by evil people. At the least, their constituents are no more or less evil than the societies in which they reside. Along with the Jim Joneses and Dark Age Popes we find the Martin Luthers and Pope Johns. Most ministers—the rank and file of the ecclesia—undertake as tough and thankless a job as a police sergeant. Some are as doltish as the Reverend Dawn; others possess I.Q.s in excess of 130. Churches have supported the Crusades, organized slavery and witch-burning; they have also financed hospitals, colleges, and poverty- and drug-relief programs. The institution of the Church **is** a two-edged sword, to unearth another cliche. But comics have shown us only **one** edge far too often.

Religion is a force of incalculable power. Every culture on earth, in every time period, has exhibited the need to worship. Agnosticism and atheism are only developed after sufficient acculturation. At its best, religion offers guidance; at its worst, it utterly controls. **Any** power can be abused. It is up to the individual to decide the level of his dedication, and a healthy skepticism—not necessarily a total rejection—is a ready aide. Nobody [except anarchists] argues for the abolition of government simply because of the existence of tyrants.

DC has addressed the "God question" far less frequently than Marvel, probably because DC has very few "omnipotent" characters. [By "omnipotent" wemean somewhere far above the level of Superman, something around the weight class of Eternity or the Celestials.] In the Marvel Universe, the heavens are filled with more deities and pseudo-deities than you can shake Aaron's rod at. An interesting pattern of thought emerged during the mid-1970s: to become a god, one had to become "one with the Universe."

Possibly this "oneness" began way back in 1965 with Eternity, the man-shaped universe of the Dr. Strange series. At that time, Odin was probably at the uppermost power level of the Marvel cosmos. [Thor referred to Odin as the "living omnipotence" in many Stan Lee issues, and, though he didn't have **quite** that power—even back then, Odin was still vulnerable to some forces—he was quite capable of putting the whole human race in suspended animation in **Journey Into Mystery #**104 and shoving them into a sideral dimension just to make room for a battle!] He also possessed the Odinsword, a huge scabbarded blade which would destroy the universe when unsheathed. When an enraged Dormammu attacked Eternity, though, in **STRANGE TALES #146**, the Universal Man termed it a blasphemous attack and nearly annihilated his foe. Dormammu stayed nearly annihilated for 25 issues until Roy Thomas, a power even mightier than Eternity, decided to revive him.

Somewhere in the Second Generation of Marvel writers, it was decided to use oneness with the

universe as the ultimate state of being. In **CAPTAIN MARVEL #29**, a cosmic watchdog being called Eon explains pseudo-Grecian mythology to Mar-Vell and recounts how Zeus' father Kronos fell victim to an exploding power tube which caused him to merge his life force with that of the universe. Two issues later, the master villain Thanos shackled Kronos and used the Cosmic Cube to make **himself** one with the universe. Two issues after **that**, the Cosmic Cube was destroyed and Thanos de-oned back to his old form.

In **MARVEL PREMIERE #10**, Dr. Strange destroyed the evil entity known as Shuma—Gorath by killing the Ancient One, who promptly became one with the universe. Some years later, the discarnate mystic saved his disciple from Eternity's wrath [**DR. STRANGE #13**] and then merged with Eternity, proving that to be one with the cosmos was to be one with Eternity. In **MARVEL PREMIERE #14**, when Sise-Neg became a "God," he accumulated enough mystic power to unite him with the creation. Later, in **GIANT-SIZE AVENGERS #4**, when the heroine Mantis became the Celestial Madonna and married her suitor, the reanimated Swordsman, both transmuted their beings into life-energy and became one, or maybe two, with the universe.

[Interestingly enough, this has been tried once in DC Comics, specifically in **JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #114**. In this story, author Len WEin had the villainous Libra tap enough power from the JLA to transform himself into a "one-with" being. But the sudden, powerful flow of data from all parts of the cosmos discorporated him. Every idea or train of thought he tried to pursue was replaced by a new and better one, until he exclaimed, "I—am—**lost**!" just before his spirit form broke up. Actually, this is probably the most believable result of "oneing" that I've seen so far.]

Even Steve Gerber tried to satirize Oneness With the Universe. But his sentiment always wins over his cynicism, and even he couldn't put it down. **HOWARD THE DUCK #14** saw the Marvelous Mallard possessed by a demonic self-soul, exorcised, and scattered in consciousness-form willy-nilly over the city of Cleveland. In effect, he became "at **one** with Cleveland," and experienced the lives and inner beings of a thousand people—street punks, housewives, factory workers, excectutives, senior citizens, pre-teenagers. It may have been satire, but even Gerber could not deny its power. When Howard was reassembled in his own body, "he **wakes**, so consumed at first with emotion that he cannot see, cannot hear, cannot speak...only **weep**!" "What happened to me?" asked Howard. "I **saw**—something! Ahh—forget it. Musta been a **weather balloon!**"

In all fairness, it must be said that Steve did attempt such a satire successfully in a fill-in text issue of **HTD**, **#**16, with a "battle scene" wherein he described a Las Vegas chorus girl "find[ing her-self in the thrill of battle, becom[ing] one with her headdress, and [being] elevated to goddesshood...Basically, it's like most every other comic mag."

Thus, if Marvel could be said to have one true religion, it might be that form of transcendentalism which advocates being one with the universe. This will probably only do you any good if you can find a set of instructions on Oneing. In Marvel Comics it happens so often that it seems to have a decided snob appeal.

Of course, with all the delivering into the upper power-levels of the Marvel and DC universes, both have uneasily begun to consider where God must be in all this firmament. Several comics authors have acknowledged that a Deity greater than Thor, Odin

THIS IS THE END OF LIFE AS YOU HAVE KNOWN IT, BELOVED. HAVE YOU ANY REGRETS.. DOUBTS?
NONE, BELOVED. THIS ONE HAS LIVED AS SHE WOULD--AND NOW, WE TWO SHALL LIVE AS WE WILL!
THEN, I ALLOW THIS BODY TO BECOME THE PUREST ENERGY--
--AND IF YOU SURRENDER YOURSELF--
--YOU CAN ALSO ACHIEVE THIS STATE!

or Zeus exists in their four-color world. Steve Englehart, in **AVENGERS #118** (1972), had the Watcher say that the word "God" could mean **many** things, and might apply, in different ways, to different beings. Later, in **DR. STRANGE #13** (1976), he had Eternity admit that neither he nor his brother Death was God, "for God rules all realities!" Chris Claremont, in **DEADLY HANDS OF KUNG FU #22**, said that his ubiquitous demon-deities, the N'Garai, "were driven from the earth—by the One True God, some say, though I do not know for sure..." (1976) E. Nelson Bridwell, in a **"Captain Marvel"** story, had old Shazam pray, "And may He Who is greater than all the Elders [the Shazam gods] watch over you, my children!" [**SHAZAM #35**, 1978] Gerry Conway, in a Justice League—Justice Society—New Gods team-up (1980), had the Earth-Two Wonder Woman speak of her Greco-Roman gods and of the "One True God," Whose nature was unknown. In the process of demoting their super-heroic "deities" to a less-than-worshipful state, both Marvel and DC have acknowledged that their fictional universes are theistic, with a definite Judeo-Christian flavor. (It'd be interesting to speculate how things would have gone if comics houses were based primarily in India or Russia, for example...)

Lately, thanks to a pretty tragic incident, Marvel comics has all but totally backed off from the religion question. **DEFENDERS**, in a serial leading up to their 100th issue, brought together most of the devil-figures in their cosmos (Thog, Mephisto, "Satan," Satannish, and probably one or two more) for a free-for-all in which not only did Daimon Hellstrom, tragically, choose to follow his father when dominated by the Darksoul, but it was revealed (though this will probably be retracted) that Patsy Walker was the daughter of the Devil! Since then, editor Jim Shooter has reportedly asked his writers to cool off on demonic adversaries and elaborate metaphysics, as the story was not received well (read: hated by practically everybody). In a recent issue of **AVENGERS** which he scripted, even the Ghost Rider, who has grown progressively more ferocious, alleged that he was not linked to the true Devil, but was just a being from another dimension, not unlike Thor.

What, then, needs to be done with religion in the cosmos?

Well, for one thing, a little bit more care might be exercised. If a comics universe is theistic in the Judeo-Christian manner, rather than in the Manichean fashion, then Evil may only exist by the sufferance of Good, and the Bad Guys, at least on the spiritual plane, must inevitably lose. This doesn't presuppose a pip of a battle. In Daniel 10:13, the angelic messenger allows that he had a tough time getting through to the prophet when an evil force opposed him, and had to get the archangel Michael

to help him prevail. In C.S. Lewis's **PERELANDRA**, the reluctant hero Ransom is made aware that good certainly will triumph even if he shucks his duties—crushing a new serpent in Eden—but that the price might be even higher than a crucifixion in the long run. Or, to put it even more simply, we all know Batman is going to win his 487th battle with the Joker, but **how** he does it keeps us coming back for more.

The world should not be overpopulated with agents of Satan, and "agents of H.E.A.V.E.N." should not be neglected. If vampires were as rife as **TOMB OF DRACULA** IMPLIED, AND ECH ONE WAS CURSED WITH A THIRST THAT MUST BE SATED EACH NIGHT BY A HUMAN VICTIM, THE WORLD WOULD BE POPULATED EXCLUSIVELY, IN A VERY FEW YEARS, BY Undead. And if they were allowed to be numerous and of great power, surely there must be opposite numbers of equal or greater force. Thus far, we've seen only one, Janus. But Good Guy vampire detective Hannibal King may qualify; **something** allows him to resist Dracula's commands. A Spectre of the 1960s persuasion would also be welcome, if one could find out what to do with the red-handed 1970s version. (In a recent Spectre-Batman teamup, author Fleisher toned down the ghost so that he merely opposed a supernatural beings and didn't indulge in any human-killing sprees.) Herein might be the seeds of another JLA-JSA teamup, as an evil Spectre under the dominance of a malefic being like Shathan battles a good Spectre avowed to stop him.

If comics writers intend to use theology in their stories, they should bone up on it a bit, believers or not. You don't write a story about the Battle of the Bulge without checking reference works, and you shouldn't treat religious philosophy and/or belief any different. Remember, too, that it is offensive to most believers if a super-hero is stated outright to be in the direct employ of Yahwey, as if he should be included in the same breath with Moses or Paul, and even more than a few unbelievers will probably be miffed by the cavalier treatment of such a system of religion.

Such a super-hero must be given at least a slight aura of mystery. In practice, it might be handled something in the fashion of Captain Canuck, who prayed to God for aid in escaping a trap; he wasn't greeted by an angelic visions but he **did** find the one loose brick in the prison wall. The Phantom Stranger, warrior for mystical good, is a supernatural avenger who makes war on physical and metaphysical evil, but he is never pinned down as to what manner of being he is or what agency he serves, and his comic ran for over seven years. It was enough for the Spectre, in the old days, to hear a Voice without our being told outright the being it belonged to.

Writers should, at the same time, be careful not to get **too** specific as to religious philosophy. There are so many divisions of Christianity, or of any other religion, that advocation of any one of them outright immediately sides all the rest against you. [If, say, Janus takes time out from chasing Dracula on Sunday, what could this mean for the Jewish or Seventh-Day Adventist readers in the fold?] And it should be permitted to put down religious **fanaticism**—if the writer and reader are aware and hav eit acknowledged that many, in fact most, religionists are **not** fanatics. [Again, we turn to Steve Englehart for a nice example of this: his **CAPTAIN AMERICA** supporting character, Dave Cox, was a pacifist on religious grounds and was presented in an entirely favorable light.]

Does this system of guidelines sound difficult to apply? Probably. It requires the writer to **think** before he states his ideas—a hard enough practice anyway, given deadline pressure. But, if not, we end up with inadequately thought-out stories, unsatisfying in their incompleteness and more than likely galling to a good portion of the readership.

The alternative is leaving religion out of the comics altogether, and that might be the wrong tack, though it would eliminate the excesses. This author, for one, doesn't believe that is necessary. Many good theistic stories have turned up in four-color pages, such as **SILVER SURFER #3** and **DR. STRANGE #16**. It all depends on the treatment of the subject.

After all, no single Marvel or DC writer controls the cosmos he is working in. He shares it with many different writers and artists, and with the readers who try to graft the whole of each universe into a meaningful whole. Unlike a mainstream or genre prose fiction writer, he can't construct his own specific universe; it belongs to a lot of other people, too.

That's enough to make any author think a bit before he tries to play God.

And if that's the only result of this four-issue soapbox study, then it's more than fulfilled its purpose.

Visit the land of Letters!

LOC needs your ideas and opinions. After all, YOU know what you think about comics, but WE don't. This is YOUR chance to let fandom in on your opinions and ideas on comics. Pick up your pen TODAY and WRITE!

KATHLEEN GLANCY
The World of Comics in Verse

"KATHOLOCITY"

Alas, I was accursed from my birth.
  The day I first arrived—on Marvel-Earth
Was the same day the Invaders came to town
  Red Skull-controlled, they came and tore it down,
Then fought a battle over all the region
  With some new group or some new Legion.
The sounds that first came to my baby ears
  Were wooshes, zaps and crashes, sundry jeers,
The noise of falling buildings—sounds of strife
  That followed me [oh woe] for all my life.
I got through school in reasonable peace
  [Ah,how was I to know how soon 'twould cease?].
And left, and opened up a clothing store
  Round about issue 1, Fantastic Four.
And the first customer that fate did bring
  Was an unfittable and irate Thing
Who wrecked the joint. With compensation cash
  I thought at farming I would have a bash—
At Rutland, Vermont then a farm I bought
  And a worse place to go I couldn't have got.
For soon I was to find that every year
  Some bunch of super-heroes would appear
And always, always, to my misery
  Their battles all would somehow damage me.
Thor caused a thunderstorm, which caused a flood
  And Dracula drained my best milk-dow's blood.
As it reached Hallowe'en each year I trembled;
  Daredevil broke my windows. The Assembled
Avengers knocked my barn down, and the bulk
  Of my new crops were trampled by the Hulk.
'Twas Iron Man's far-famed repulsor ray
  That accidentally tore my roof away.
The Dread Dormammu, twixt one dusk and dawn
  Appeared on Earth—in fact, on my front lawn;
And then an ill-aimed spell from Dr Strange
  As he fought Dorm my face did rearrange
For several months, and women are odd creatures
  And do no much love men with warthog features.

And as I fled the scene [why was I born?]
  Directly overhead flew Aragorn—
And do you think with pigeons you've got trouble?
  So my bad luck did double and redouble.
I left the farm, for my insurance man
Had just disowned me with a lifelong ban,
And moved again, for peace and quiet a questor
  To the so-called q uiet suburb of Westchester
And got a place beside a private school.
  [Alack for me, the unsuspecting fool]
    A gang of youthful weirdos lived next door
  With a bald, crippled gent, and what is more
Still weirder were the folks who came to call
  On them, and finished up flung through my wall.

I left again, now in despair, and so, sir
Went to New York, where I became a grocer.
I thought if I lay low I might be missed—
It was not so. [Oh why do I exist?]
Going for a stroll, my spirits at the ebb
Alas, I intercepted Spidey's web.
"So you're stuck fast" he said, "No need to worry
"It wears off in twelve hours—you're in no hurry"
And as he shot his web and swung away
I shouted "I **agree** with Jonah J!
"I like him well!" [My name is Jonah too.
You never would have guessed that fact would you?]
Thereafter—but for several kung-fu dramas
Involving men in red or green pyjamas
And one in white long-johns, beneath my sill—
All was serene for one whole week, until
I woke one morning to a sonic boom,
And found the Inhumans gathered in my room.
It seemed their dog had brought them there in error
So, giving me some gold to soothe my terror
They left. **They** left, but bloody Lockjaw stayed
And ate my stock up. So I fled dismayed.
I got on the first Greyhound bus that came,
And it took me to Cleveland, of whose fame
You have to understand I'd never heard—
Especially about a certain bird.

I got there, and the night was black as ink
And no-one would take gold for food and drink.
They didn't believe it **was** gold. No cash left
Had I, and so I roamed, of food bereft
Until I saw—it seemed like such good luck—
Waddling along the street, this huge great duck.
"It's dressed" I thought "It must be someone's pet"
But I was starving, and here food I'd met!
I pounced, one "Waughhh!" and—though I do not boast
Of that 'fowl' deed—he made a lovely roast.
How could I know that, eating to survive,
I'd just made Marvel's profits take a dive?

And so, pursued by maniacal Lee
And screaming Gerber, swiftly must I flee.
Refuge I found in a mad scientist's home
[There's one on every street in Marveldom]
I gave to him some gold to save my skin,
And this great huge machine he threw me in.

His tri-dimensional-transporter, mark five
Soon sent me to [oh why am I alive?]
Earth-One. My stay there was five minutes old
When I was frozen stiff by Captain Cold,
Thawed out by Heatwave, whisked off by the Flash,
Who threw me casually upon some trash.
A Gerry Conway time-warp then I hit
Enemy Ace I met, and hiw wolf bit
My leg. A future time I reached, afraid,
Where scores of super-heroes romped and played.
When I saw them, so loud my screams did pierce,
They sent me back in time to save their ears.
I reached Metropolis, and caught my death
Of cold from gusts of someone's super-breath.
I went to Gotham City in the night,
Bumped into Batman, nearly died of fright.
Went to Coast City, where [why me, God, why?]
Green Lantern fought a battle in the sky
With red Sinestro. Some stray energy
Blasted my car, and nearly blasted me.
Trembling with fear, for my escape was narrow,
I fled off to Star City, where Green Arrow
Missed his shot's mark, for once in his career—
Guess who he neatly punctured in the rear?
And as I limped away [alas, alack]
He rudely yelled, "Hey, bring my arrow back!"
I'd had enough. Finito. I was beat.
I threw myself down at the Flash's feet
[He kicked me by mistake] and begged his aid;
And so by Cosmic Treadmill he conveyed
Me to the super-hero-less Earth prime,
And I should be quite happy now. But I'm
Not really so, alas, for sad to say
This world of yours seems somehow rather...gray. ●

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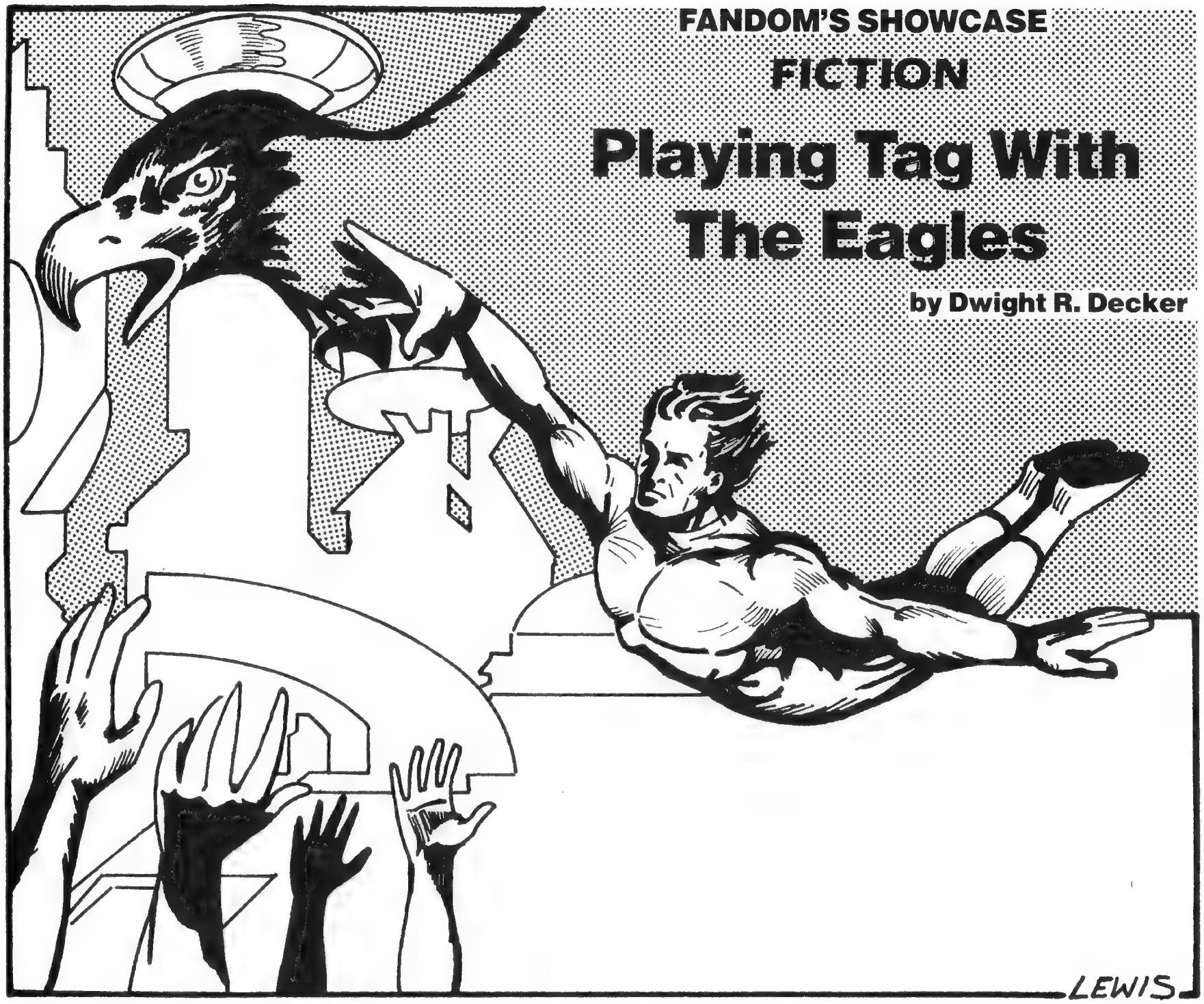
FICTION

Playing Tag With The Eagles

by Dwight R. Decker



WOLFGANG FLETCHER LIKED to read old super-hero comic books. Even though some of the earliest had been published nearly two centuries before, he could still identify with them — especially the parts about secret identities. Besides, they were largely responsible for the shape the world was in today.

And perhaps most importantly for Wolf, they helped take his mind off his problems. He sat on the carpeted floor, back against the padded wall, and read the enormously enlarged pages on the wall-sized screen in front of him. At that size, all the deficiencies in the artwork were glaringly evident but that only added to the charm. Wolf was so engrossed as he advanced from one page to the next that he completely forgot about the passing time.

With his light brown hair and naturally handsome, surgically unaltered face, Wolf would have been considered a good-looking young man if he hadn't been quite so musclebound. He was 24 years old and of average height, but stocky and muscular — overly so by current standards. His tunic and slacks had to be made with unusual specifications programmed into the tailor. Tonight, however, his best suit, custom-fitted no more than a year before, hung a little loosely on him.

About the time Lois Lane was beginning to realize that the mild-mannered reporter she worked with was really Superman, and Superman was engineering an elaborate hoax to disabuse her of that notion, the chime on Wolf's wristcom sounded. Signing, he lifted his wrist in front of his face and said "Hello." The tiny screen lit up with the video image of a young woman's face. Wolf recognized the pretty if zaftig brunette instantly and realized with a smart why she had called.

"Wolf!" Tanya O'Connor exclaimed. "Where are you? You should have been here half an hour ago!"

"Sorry," Wolf told her, a little embarassed. "I got wrapped up in something here at home."

"How could you forget?" Tanya demanded, honestly astonished. "A party in your honor at Sky Haven — and you forgot it?"

Could it be because I would have rather skipped the whole thing? Wolf asked himself. "Look, Tanya, I'll be right out."

"But you'll be ***hours*** getting here —"

Wolf thought fast. "No, I won't. One of my neighbors is heading out that way and I'll hook on with him. See you soon —"

Tanya seemed a little mollified. "Well, all right . . . but please hurry! Everyone's waiting for you!"

"Right," Wolf said, and after an exchange of endearments with the woman he wanted to be the mother of his children, broke off the comlink. As yes, Tanya — Wolf wondered vaguely what those children would look like, since her present face wasn't the one she was born with. it was one of the more popular styles, modified to match her somewhat fleshy body, and her secret sorrow was that it had been her second choice: her favorite face in the catalog was designed to go only with much slimmer figures. And yet she wasn't ***fat*** in the ancient sense of the term — just . . . underexercised.

Wolf consoled himself for forgetting the party by reflecting that no one else there would be too put out by his lateness. They were all members of the Rhea Foundation, and as such they were notorious for missing appointments because of their difficulties in arranging for transportation. A little reluctantly, he blanked the screen and turned out the lights in his apartment.

He let the door iris shut behind him and stepped out on the back patio. His apartment was on the ground floor and around him towered the buildings of the city, columns of brilliant light rearing against the night sky and separated by wide stretches of park and farmland.

I hate to do this, Wolf thought, but there was no other way to ge to Sky Haven in a reasonable amount of time. He glanced quickly around to see if anyone he knew might be watching, then tensed to spring —

"Hey, Wolf!" called a voice from overhead. "How's the weather down there?"

Caught off-balance, Wolf nearly fell over, but he corrected himself and glanced up. Hovering in the air by the doorway to his third-floor apartment was old Mr. Li; he grinned down at Wolf and waved.

Smiling wryly, Wolf waved back. "Hi, Larry. The weather's fine down here — I just stepped out to enjoy some of it."

"I was out for my evening flight," said Mr. Li. "Does an old man good to go a few kilometers out and back. When I was young, I could practically play tag with the eagles but I'm slowing down a little these days. Not much, but just enough to notice . . . can't quite catch up with the women anymore. By the way," he added reflectively, "I haven't seen you legging it around the park lately. Not since you got back from Jagannath."

Would you please go inside? Wolf thought in some exasperation. "Oh, I've been pretty busy since then. They elected me president of the regional chapter of the Rhea Foundation while I was gone and that's taken up a lot of my time."

"That's that outfit that wants staircases and ladders installed everywhere," mused Mr. Li. "Well, good luck on that, but I still think you ought to try to get some sort of portable antigrav unit so you people can be more like the rest of us. Good night, son." With a casual twist of his shoulders, Mr. Li aimed his body toward the open doorway and glided on inside.

"Good night," said Wolf half to himself as Mr. Li's doorway closed. He tensed again for the spring —

"Did not!"

"Did too!"

This was getting out of hand. Rounding the curve of the building about three floors up came the Trozzolo twins, boys aged nine who fought loudly with each other almost constantly. Leaning against the wall and drumming his fingers, Wolf waited for them to pass by. Perversely, they chose to come to blows right then and there. They traded a few ineffectual punches, but the flaring blue defense field fended off a fist driven with any amount of force before it could land. Failing at that, they resorted to trying to ram each other. The blue flashes of the defense were pretty but nothing else was accomplished. Finally they flew off, still screaming at each other about alleged cheating at a game of air hockey.

Once the twins were out of sight, Wolf looked around carefully. Some people flew by in a group a few hundred meters away, but no one was close.

He crouched, then leaped, thrusting his arms straight up. An electric tingle ran through his body, a faintly glowing blue field formed around him, and he shot into the sky with a rush of displaced air. The wind tore at his face as he climbed, the lights in the windows of buildings slid past him in a continuous stream, and then he was past the rooftops, rising into the empty night. The city fell away beneath him and contracted into an abstract gridwork of light against the blackness of the earth.

At an altitude he roughly estimated to be two kilometers, he abruptly twisted his body into a horizontal position, nearly spraining some abdominal muscles that were not yet used to the demands of flying, and leveled off, streaking on across the countryside towards the north. Not many people flew this high and he was alone except for the stars gleaming coldly overhead and an occasional wisp of cloud. His muscles were beginning to ache a little as he strained them harder into the direction he wanted to go and accelerated. Above a certain speed, his defense shield acted as a windbreak, allowing just enough air through for him to breathe and deflecting the rest around him, but even that much was enough to blow his hair back.

I should feel exhilarated, Wolf thought, but all he could muster was a tepid mixture of sadness and regret. ***Why couldn't this have happened to me years ago — when I needed it?***

Far to the west he could see the blinking red lights of the HyperCom Tower, a transmission aerial fully one kilometer high. Involuntarily, his memory replayed scenes of the time when he was about 12 and the neighborhood boys flew him to one of the tower's upper girders and left him stranded there. For nearly five hours he had clung in terror to the narrow beam numb from the cold and half-sick from the tower's incessant swaying in the wind. A comtech making a routine inspection finally found Wolf and bawled him out loudly and profanely, suspecting incipient vandalism. Only slowly did the comtech grasp the nature of the problem and even then he had little sympathy for Wolf. Wolf's father later tried to lodge a complaint against the boys who had left him on the tower, but their parents and even the authorities merely chuckled about youthful high spirits. There was some mild tut-tutting about the fact that the gang had taken Wolf's wristcom off and dropped it somewhere so he couldn't call for help, but no one, not even the boys themselves, could be made to realize that the prank might have had fatal consequences.

Now that it wouldn't have made any difference. The experience had left him terrified of the appalling emptiness of the open sky for years, but that had changed. Everything had changed.

I told myself that I would never fly even though I could, just for the sake of principle, Wolf thought ruefully. ***Then I told myself I'd fly only in case of emergency. Now I'm flying so I won't be too late to a party. Where will it stop?*** There was no immediate answer to that question. Shaking his head in bemusement, he pressed onward.

Within minutes, Sky Haven came into view: a blazing beacon shining in the night, an island of stability in the midst of the null and the void, an enormous resort hotel that floated two kilometers above the ground. Wolf braked as he approached, one of the more difficult maneuvers to master; for an adult who had not been flying since infancy. It was a matter of continuing to hurtle forward while tensing the muscle backwards. The defense field had protected him from any number of bruises and broken bones while he was learning.

Sky Haven's basic shape was that of a long, rectangular box bristling with balconies, landing decks for helitaxis and supply carriers, communications antennae, and attached outbuildings. Although it served a certain amount of nonhuman trade and the Rhea Foundation sometimes held functions there, it was designed mainly for people who themselves were free of gravity but needed places to put things down that weren't. As Wolf came closer, he saw people silhouetted against the lighted windows, swarming like midges around an outdoor lamp. He angled towards a huge globe-shaped structure at one end — the ballroom. As far as he could tell, no one was in the air there.

He touched down lightly on the deserted deck outside the ballroom doorway, bending a little at the knees as he mentally deactivated the subcutaneous flying web and allowed gravity to reassert itself, and stood up straight. Around him was a scattering of tables, with small holes in them to hold glasses against the steady winds, but no chairs. As the sole concession to the special requirements of tonight's guests, the Sky Haven management had strung a waist-high rope between poles at the edge of the deck. Wolf glanced over the side: there was nothing but air and darkness between the overhanging deck and the ground. Only a very occasional lonely light two kilometers below testified to any sign of life in the gloomy vastness. Shrugging, Wolf turned and walked across the deck towards the ballroom door. Once again it occurred to him that he was one of the very few people who could both walk ***and*** fly.

When he touched his finger to an illuminated button set inconveniently high on the wall, the door irised open, flooding the deck with light, and he stepped through into the foyer. The sounds of music, laughter, conversation, and tinkling glasses filtered through the wall from the main ballroom as Wolf took off his hard-soled shoes, tagged them, and set them on the floor with the rows of other pairs of shoes belonging to his fellow members. One of the benefits of membership was cooperative buying of things like hard shoes that hadn't been made commercially for well over a century. He took a pair of folded slippers out of his pocket, put them on, and walked into the ballroom.

The scene of some 200 people pooling at the bottom of a yawningly empty, sphere-shaped interior reminded Wolf of how little place civilization had for members of the Rhea Foundation. Tables projecting from the walls were stubbed along the upper surfaces like spiraling terraces, but went unused while below portable tables had been set

up on a temporary flooring. A few couples were dancing a graceful waltz to recorded music — if nothing else, the Rhea Foundation had kept alive some of the older, now obsolete artforms like dancing while subject to gravity —and the rest stood in small groups and talked or sat at the tables, cramped and huddled together in a tiny space with open vastness going wasted just overhead. But something in the Rhean spirit refused to be intimidated, even if providing it meant holding affairs in floating ballrooms two kilometers up. We may have to make adjustments, but we will not be read out of the human race just because we can't fly; we will go where you go and do what you do. Wolf recalled Mr. Li's suggestion about antigravity backpacks — they would have been fine if they were practical, but the massive equipment required to generate a field in which one mass would react against the mass of the earth was workable only on Sky Haven's scale; the flying web that enabled most people to fly might as well have been a gift from the gods, for its technology was impossible to duplicate. The Rheans had to get around as best they could, even if it meant walking.

Wolf winced a little when he saw the sign that someone had hung up over the refreshment table: CONGRATS, MR. PRESIDENT!

How can I tell these people? he wondered. ***How can I let them trust me and then let them down?***

In the small knot of people closest to the doorway where Wolf stood, one of his best friends was holding forth. "...I think it's time we got a law passed making it a crime for people to call us 'ostriches!' " Abdul Salazar exclaimed. "I don't know about you, but I'm getting sick of it!" He was a slightly pudgy man, in his early 30s, and his complexion

and features reflected his South American/Egyptian heritage.

"But it's what we are, isn't it?" wondered an older woman. "We're flightless birds — that's where we get the name 'Rhea,' after all — "

"**We** can call ourselves that," Abdul snapped, "but it isn't right for other people!" He glanced up just then and saw Wolf, and a blindingly white smile lit up his dark face. "Hey — look who's here! El Presidente himself!"

After that, Wolf was lost in a flurry of shaking hands and accepting congratulations from everyone in sight. The warmth and goodwill of the people crowding him, from children to still youthful-looking oldtimers, was sincere and spontaneous, a very real thing Wolf could almost taste. He was much younger than many of the members here tonight, but a majority of them had liked and respected enough to vote for him as their leader and spokesman him — in large part because his whole life had been a symbol of their own.

From somewhere in the middle of the crowd of well-wishers burst Tanya, rushing up to him and throwing her arms around his neck. "Wolf!" she exclaimed delightedly, kissing him. "You made it! I was just about to call you again — I was worried you couldn't get a ride!"

"Uhm . . . Like I said, I knew somebody who was coming out this way, so I tagged along." At least it was no more than half a lie. It also reminded Wolf of the elaborate explanations some of the comic book super-heroes had to use to protect their secret identities. A real super-hero, he suspected, would have soon abandoned the double identity charade as more trouble than it was worth. The worst part about it was the lies he had to tell the woman now wrapped around him. Before Jagannath, he had prided himself on being completely open and honest with Tanya; after Jagannath, he'd had to mark off a large section of his life as off-limits to her for fear that if she found out he would lose her. And the feel of her warm body pressing against his and the fragrance of her off-world perfume made him more determined than ever ***not*** to lose her. It was said that love in the air, unrestrained by gravity, was an experience bordering on total ecstasy, impossible for an earthbound ostrich even to imagine, but Wolf remembered long starlit nights with Tanya in grassy meadows with the scent of clover heavy in the air, and decided that in the long run, the ***who*** far outweighed the ***where*** or the ***how.***

The others in the crowd smiled indulgently at Tanya's show of affection. The Rhea Foundation also served as a social club where ostriches could meet flightless birds of a feather, and a large number of longterm cohabitation contracts and children had resulted. The track record for relationships with people outside the flock was so spectacularly dismal due to sheer incompatibility that for most of its members the Foundation really was the only game in town. Wolf and Tanya had been a couple for months, and it was common knowledge that they were thinking about drawing up a formal contract; in a way, they were thought of by their fellow members as the archetypical Rhean couple, living proof that a full life was possible even on the ground. They were a Symbol.

Tanya drew back a little. "Wolf — you're losing weight!"

She would notice that; she knew him too well not to. He managed a shrug. "Ever since Jagannath . . . you know."

She nodded. "A terrible experience like that . . . yeah, I'd lose my appetite, too. But it's been a couple of months now; you should be over it. Once we get settled in together, I'll make sure you eat right."

That wasn't the problem. Since getting back from Jagannath, Wolf's appetite had more than doubled. He had eaten several times that day and already he was eyeing the refreshment table.

In a low voice, Tanya added: "I know you've got things to do, so I'll go talk to some other people, but I want to see you later. Maybe we can get in a dance or two?"

"Yeah, I'm all for — "

"But we ***have*** to talk. You haven't been the same since you got back, and I'm getting worried. Something's wrong, I know it!" She kissed him again before he could reply. "So I'll see you later," she said and slipped away.

That was another thing about the secret identity business. Tanya knew him too well not to notice he was suddenly hiding something from her. There were only so many lame excuses he could make, only so many questions he could dodge giving straight answers to, before she started adding things up — especially if they started living together and she saw how much he was eating.

He would fly over that chasm when he came to it. He went back to greeting his friends and fellow members.

Suddenly a fur-covered hand was thrust into his, a hand with three fingers and two thumbs. Even before he looked up, Wolf knew whose it had to be. "Turner! When did you get back to Earth?"

The Intellectual-Class Packrat, who more or less resembled a two-meter tall collie standing on his hind legs

and wearing a long, belted robe, bared his teeth — as close as he could get to a smile. "Salutations, old friend," Turner said in perfect English, though his pronunciation was mangled somewhat by his lack of fleshy lips. "I arrived just yesterday and thought I would surprise you by attending tonight's party. After all, am I not also a flightless bird? Perhaps even more so than some."

Turner looked at him ironically, and Wolf knew full well what he meant. Turner had been ***there*** on Jagannath.

Wolf wanted to talk to him, privately if possible, but that was when Osamu Wasserman pushed forward and interrupted. "Wolf — did you hear about Pasquale Vohland? He ***fell***!"

Conversation in the immediate area instantly went dead. A few people groaned.

"Oh Christ!" Wolf blurted. "How far?"

Osamu sighed and looked at his slippers. "Twelve floors. Some kids were playing, there was no railing on the balcony, and he was knocked off. Nobody thought anything about it, and . . . well, that was this morning."

"Lord . . . !" Wolf glanced back at Turner. "Old Pasquale was too proud and stubborn to join Rhea," he explained. "He said we were all a bunch of cripples leaning on each other for support and that he'd gotten along all of his life without us well enough. Well, he died as he lived. Alone."

"What if he ***had*** joined?" demanded Abdul Salazar. "He still would have fallen even if he was a member! It didn't save Judy Anderson last year when she tripped into an open doorway in the floor! We need railings and steps and ladders, not membership cards."

"I agree," Wolf said, "but we can't get anything like that because there aren't enough of us — Pasquale should have joined so there would have been at least one more person demanding these things. We'll never get anywhere if we can't get support from our own kind!"

"We? Us?" Turner's voice was barely above a faint rumble, but the amusement in it was obvious. He nodded and left Wolf to carry on the argument.

What I am saying? Wolf thought, suddenly brought up short. ***He's right. I'm not one of them anymore***.

From somewhere in the crowd, he heard Tanya talking to one of her friends. "Just because they can fly, the birdbrains think they're better than us, and they can be so cruel! They don't understand us, they don't even want to understand us. Sometimes I think I hate every one of them!" Wolf remembered Tanya telling him that she had been raped several times in her teens by airborne men who saw her as easy, defenseless prey. The authorities had not been sympathetic because they couldn't really comprehend the crime — a flying woman with an operating defense field was virtually impossible to rape. Tanya had been bitter about the flying majority ever since.

"Just because we can't fly, we're discriminated against!" someone else declared.

Wolf heard other voices —

"The government should do something!"

"Ha! The government's a joke — and the politicians are all fliers, anyway!"

"We ought to start our own colony somewhere and get away from the fliers."

"Great. What happens when we have kids who ***can*** fly, like the Sandersons?"

"Well, ***I*** think people who can't fly are better than those who can!" Tanya said. "We've suffered more!"

Wolf felt a headache coming on. He needed fresh air and time to think. He excused himself and slipped out of the ballroom. A few moments later, he stood on the windswept deck outside, clutching the flimsy rope barrier that separated him from the dark emptiness beyond, and stared out into the night. The Moon was coming up, a dazzling bright blue, green, and white half-circle, and somewhere beyond it was Mars, a brilliant blue-green spark. Venus, had it been in the sky, would have looked much the same. Man had already left his mark on the Solar System, thanks in part to Packrat technology and in part to . . . someone else. ***We have a destiny to fulfill in the Universe***, Wolf thought, considering the now-living Moon rising before him. ***We didn't ask for it — it was chosen for us. And I'm the only one who knows what and by whom.***

As he thought, he remembered — both what he knew from personal experience and what he had been told.

Wolfgang Fletcher's problems had begun the day he was born. To the horror of everyone floating in the delivery room, the newborn baby had insisted on dropping like a rock.

Out in the waiting room, the medtech tried to be compassionate when he explained the situation to Mr. Fletcher. "I'm sorry, but your son seens to be unable to fly."

Mr. Fletcher was shocked. He had never felt gravity in his life; even now he was holding a conversation while suspended in the middle of an empty room with curving walls and no definite floor. Flying was as natural as breathing. "Can't fly? Oh my God! How will he get along?"

"It isn't as bad as you think," soothed the medtech. "He's perfectly healthy otherwise — a fine baby boy you ought to be proud of. Don't worry; he'll get along fine. He'll walk. People managed for millions of years on foot, after all. They've been flying for less than 150 years. The human body was designed for walking."

Mr. Fletcher shook his head dismally. "But how could it have happened? Why ***my*** boy . . . ?"

"No one knows enough about it to explain why some people are born unable to fly," the medtech said gently. "It just happens now and then. Our flying ability comes from what amounts to a benevolent parasite: a semi-organic web linked to our nervous system. The web reproduces along with us, which is why our children can usually fly. But sometimes — not often, but sometimes — something goes wrong and a child is born with an inactive web. No one knows why. Maybe if we understood how the web works or how it's made, we could solve the problem, but the web is the product of technology so far ahead of ours and so alien that we haven't begun to figure it out. Even the Packrats are baffled by it."

"When I was a kid," Mr. Fletcher said, still numb, "we used to laugh at people who couldn't fly. We called them 'ostriches' . . . ."

Mrs. Fletcher took the news even harder and was distraught for some time. A baby that was not perfect or easily repaired was so rare that she had never seen one before, much less considered the idea that she might have one herself.

Meanwhile, Mr. Fletcher recovered from the shock in good order and began to think rationally about how to raise a seriously crippled child. He parked himself in front of his living room screen and called the library for literature on handicapped children. Most references were old: medical science had come a long way in the last century

and almost any disability could be corrected. Missing or deformed limbs could be corrected. Missing or deformed limbs could be regenerated, mental retardation could be cured, and diseases like diabetes and cystic fibrosis had gone the way of diptheria and polio. People with inactive flying webs were so rare that the literature was scant. In a way, the lack of handicapped people was unfortunate because it made someone like Wolf seem all the more freakish.

Freakish? Perhaps there lay the insight that Mr. Fletcher was looking for. His computer search turned up an old book on human oddities and on a hunch he screened it.

Late in the XIX Century, a boy with no arms had been born in what was still popularly called Germany (but more correctly the Central European Administrative District). The boy's father had been seemingly hash and unfeeling, declaring that his son was not to be coddled or pampered in any way by tender-hearted female relatives but made to do everything else. The boy was forced to learn to use his legs for arms, his feet for hands, and his toes for fingers. And learn he did, to the point that it was said he could eat dinner in a restaurant and no one would notice anything unusual at first glance. During World War I, he toured German Army hospitals as the Kaiser's personal representative to show crippled and maimed soldiers that life could go on even without everything God intended a man to have. When he wrote his autobiography, it was with good reason he called the first draft a "pediscript."

That German boy's father of the XIX Century was Mr. Fletcher's role model in the XXII Century. Wolf would not be coddled. He couldn't fly? Very well then, he would walk.

Still, Wolf's infirmity had to accommodated. A modern 20th floor apartment was a minefield of potential disasters for a flightless bird, designed as it was for people who didn't need stairs, elevators, or even most furniture — people who could use all six surfaces of a room interchangeably and found unfenced balconies, doorways in the floor, and cupboards in the ceiling not only unthreatening but inconvenient.

Mr. Fletcher solved the problem by moving. He found an old one-story house, called a "ranch-style" in the architectural histories, out in the countryside where not even Wolf could run into trouble. At first he planned no more than making a few minor adjustments, like reinstalling the front steps and basement stairs, removed long before by owners who didn't need them, but Wolf's bedroom had to have furniture and one thing led to the next. Eventually Mr. Fletcher made a hobby out of restoring the house to something like the way it had been when it was built in 1965, although Wolf was the only one in the family who ever used the antique furniture.

Before Mrs. Fletcher got into the spirit of things and realized that just as her husband was restoring an XX Century house, she was restoring an XX Century human being, there were endless complications. At first she grossly overfed the baby on high energy foods and supplements, and Wolf bloated. Only consultation with the medtechs and old baby books made her realize that people once ate far less than they did now; the energy requirements of the flying web had more than doubled the minimum calorie intake. Most people ate several large meals during the day and nibbled almost continuously in

between. Although she was aghast at how little food the medtechs advised her to feed Wolf, she put him on a strict diet and eventually whittled him down. Even so, what would have once been regarded as healthy babyfat seemed to her a sign of grotesque obesity.

Mostly on his own, he learned to crawl and then to walk. His parents read the old baby books to find out when he should start walking and if he would do it on his own or have to be taught, but they could do only so much. For his part, he was clearly puzzled that other people could move in the air and he couldn't. His pathetic efforts to take to the sky himself left him bruised. Since he didn't have the web's protective field, he was frighteningly delicate and prone to injury, but his father stood by his decision not to coddle the boy. Wolf learned to walk and not to bump into things by falling down and bumping into things. Mr. Fletcher ran across an archaic joke in his reading and chuckled sadly at how well it applied: "That class yell of the School of Experience is 'Ouch!' " Until his son was born, he had almost never heard anyone yelp in pain.

All this Wolf had been told well after the fact. His own memories begin about the time he started school. He remembered being tested by a professional education consultant, counselor, and broker who was to arrange for his classes. The counselor was dismayed by Wolf's disability: many of the cultural enrichment and social orientation classes involved field trips and group outings, and that meant having to fly. Other classes for more scholarly matters were scheduled easily enough, but Wolf still had to take a custom-made folding chair with him wherever he went and rely on charity for rides . . .

His reverie faded when he felt a furry hand on his shoulder.

"You have told no one yet?" said Turner.

Wolf glanced back at the Packrat and shook his head. "No. I should at least tell Tanya, but . . . it would mean the end of everything."

"It is not a secret that can be long hidden," said Turner gravely, "especially not from one's mate. Others have the right to know, as well: only you carry the knowledge of human destiny, and it is not proper that you should withhold that knowledge from your fellows."

Wolf gripped the restraining rope and looked away from Turner, staring unseeing into the darkness once more. "I didn't ask for this," he muttered. "I didn't want it!"

"That is what you told ***them***," said Turner bluntly, "and ***they*** told you that you have not the luxury of a choice."

"I know . . . . " Wolf whispered dully.

There was a swish of air overhead, a pause coupled with a woman's exclamation of surprise, and Signy Darguad dropped slowly into Wolf's field of vision. She hung in space about a meter and a half in front of him, a slim blonde with an attractive yet distinctive face that had not been picked out of a catalog. She somehow reminded Wolf of a picture he'd once seen of a mermaid, hovering as she did with her legs held together and her body curved in a relaxed crescent, wrapped in a tight, almost form-fitting iridescent gown that gave off a faint glow of its own.

Signy smiled. "I'm glad I found you so easily, Wolf. I'm singing in the lounge here this month, and when I saw the Rhea Foundation was scheduled for the ballroom tonight — a party in your honor, no less! — I thought I ought to drop by."

"Thanks," said Wolf, mildly disconcerted. "I'm glad you did — what's it been since I last saw you? Two years?"

"How quickly you forget. And I was the first girl who ever kissed you, too."

"Yeah, and I found out later it was on a bet."

"This isn't. I mean it." She stretched her arms to him and her body followed. Putting her hands to his cheeks, she kissed him and whispered, "Good Luck, Wolf. I wish it could have been different. . . . I know you and Tanya will be happy. Goodbye — " With that, she threw herself backwards, somersaulted, and hurtled straight down, leaving a faintly glistening blue trail in her wake.

Wolf watched her go with an ache in his heart. Tanya and Signy — one he'd won and one he'd lost, but had there ever really been a choice? Biology and destiny had driven him inexorably into one predetermined direction . . . until Jagannath had left him stranded.

"I am a Diplomat, not a member of the Psychologist Subclass," said Turner quietly, "but it seems to me that unless you act soon and decisively, happiness will elude everyone."

"I know, I know!" Wolf said miserably. "Just give me a chance to think things through!"

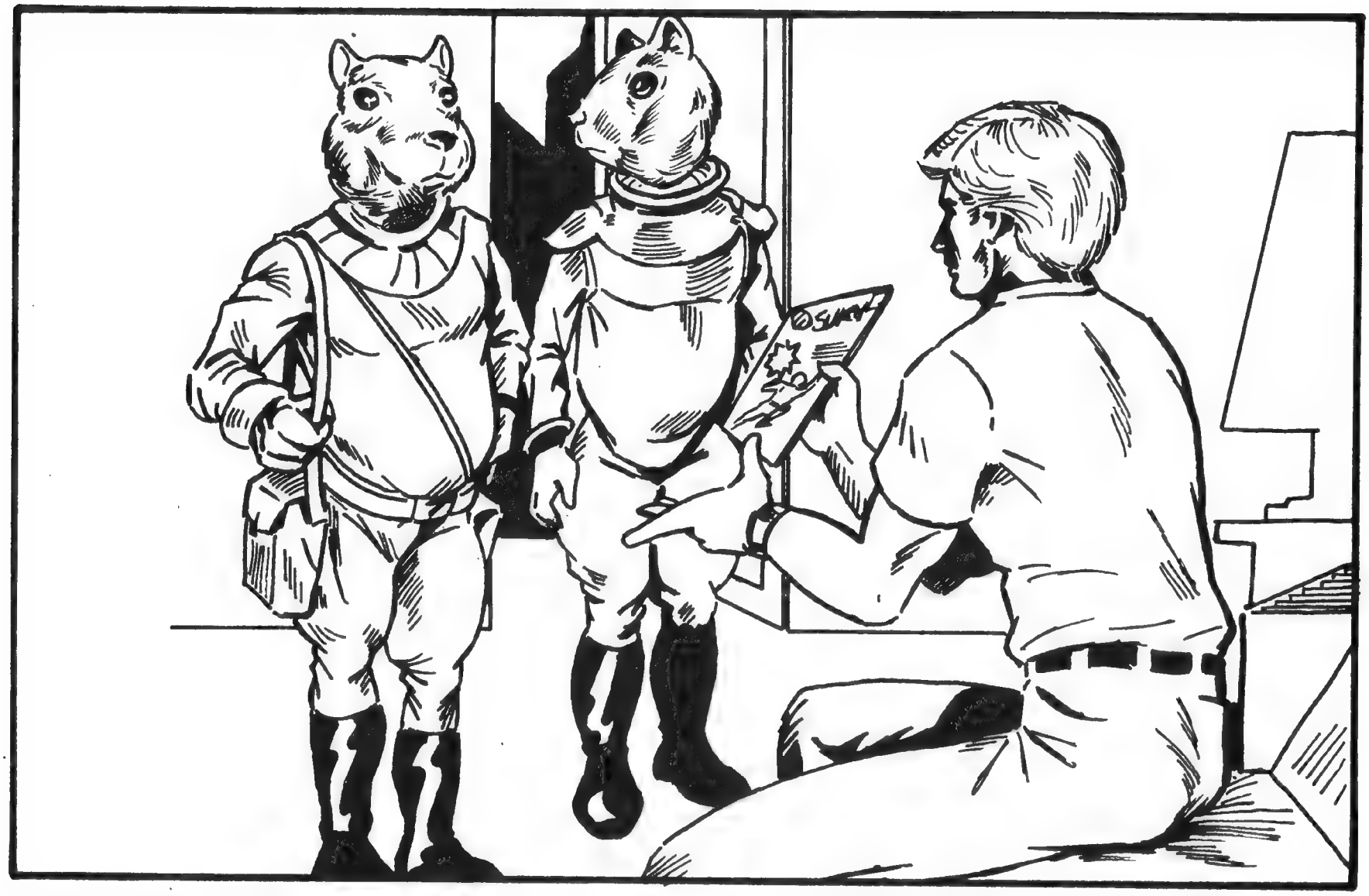
And as he thought, he remembered more.

As a child, Wolf had few close friends his own age. Not many children were willing to make the necessary allowances for him and his classmates were resentful of the special arrangements he had to have. As a result, he was forced to depend on his own company and he often took long walks. While wandering through a public park one day when he was about eight, he came across a Packrat cub, the offspring of a diplomat attached to the Packrat consulate. There weren't many Packrats in town and the flying web didn't work with Packrat biology: Wolf and the cub were in much the same boat and a friendship grew.

The young Packrat was an Intellectual, which accounted for his collie-like appearance, and of the Diplomat Subclass, which meant that his ancestors had been bred for diplomatic functions for as many thousands of years back as could be counted: Packrat society had endured with a caste system as rigid as any anthill's in essentially unchanged form for something like two million years. His full name in Packrat translated to "Unroller of the Scrolls," a fine name for an Intellectual although not very Diplomatic — his father was more typically named "Smoother of the Path." Scrolls were obsolete even in Packrat culture, and in English Unroller of the Scrolls became Pageturner, or more simply Turner.

Despite their differences in species, Wolf and Turner became friends and spent most of their free time together. Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher were even worried for a while that their son would end up more Packrat than human, but in the end inherent biology had to win out. Wolf often wondered what he'd be when he grew up, a question that Turner, the product of centuries of systematic breeding for his life function, couldn't conceive of: he found such free choice almost frightening. Most important, Packrats simply grew up faster than human beings. By the time Turner was on the brink of being a full-fledged adult, Wolf was only barely into his teens. Turner had to go back to Packrat Homeworld to finish his education and have a mate selected for him. They parted still friends, if a little more distant than they once were, and kept in touch with an occasional videogram.

By growing up a groundling and spending so much



time in the company of a talkative Packrat, Wolf had an almost unique double-outsider's viewpoint into his own society and history. Most people accepted their ability to fly without thinking much about it: it was a fact of life, like breathing and eating. Packrat scholars, on the other hand, were dumbfounded by it, especially since the flying web itself seemed to be composed of a substance that wasn't even matter in the normal sense. The mystery was where it had come from.

The first official contact between Man and Packrat came in the late XX Century when a Packrat merchant fleet, attracted by the sudden appearance of a new, rich source of radio signals in the galactic marches, arrived to add Earth to its trading network. Even then, the human race was in the midst of the social, cultural, and biological upheaveals resulting from the transition to personal flight. The Packrats (so-called because of the Trader Class's resemblance to a 1½-meter tall squirrels) were amazed because they had never seen anything like it — and astonished to discover that a previous band of Packrat traders had been the apparent cause of it.

It was not a surprise to learn that Packrat trading parties had been to Earth before: gypsy merchants roved the Galaxy far ahead of the more slowly expanding official trade network. Gypsies usually traded locally valuable raw materials for ***objets d'art*** with as little contact with the natives of pre-spaceflight cultures as possible: the quality of native art went down appreciably when the natives knew they had an audience. In this case, however, an unknown band of Packrat Traders had traded the flying web to the Terrans, something that the Packrats themselves had no knowledge of. It was the product of a technology completely alien to anything known to the Packrats and their various trading partners throughout the known Galaxy. The Galaxy was admittedly a big place and most of it was unexplored, so it was possible that some advance element of the Packrat gypsy traders had met and dealt with a hitherto unknown race with breath-taking technological capabilities, but that explanation left a few too many questions still unanswered. For one, why hadn't that race been heard of? The flying web hinted at the kind of technical expertise that could have conquered the Galaxy.

The Packrats investigated further and turned up still more puzzling details. The first band of traders hadn't offered only the flying web. Rather, a number of Terrans had been individually and covertly approached and asked a single question: "What would you like to have so much that in exchange you would give up that which you most cherish?" Most of the people approached had opted for wealth, power, sexual gratification, youth, beauty, and the like, and the trading party had accordingly obliged them. This was so much at variance with normal Packrat trading procedures that the investigators decided that the first group had been acting as agents for someone — or something — else with a personal interest in Earth. Nothing unduly remarkable happened until the traders put their proposition to a comic book collector. As comic books trafficked in that era's counterparts to myths, legends, and fairy tales, it was only natural that a collector would want most to emulate the god-like beings who featured prominently in them. The collector offered his comic book collection for the power to fly. He gave the traders his fantasy and they gave him the reality.

By the time the official group of Packrats arrived, the first group had long since left, disappearing into the galactic immensity. Whatever was intended for Earth had been accomplished. The flying web replicated itself and spread from person to person like prairie fire. More and more people took to the air all the time, national boundaries suddenly no longer meant very much, and dictatorships based on barbed wire, land mines, and firing squads collapsed. The world food supply was grossly inadequate as appetites doubled and tripled, and only emergency Packrat aid prevented a catastrophe.

The emergency was well over a century in the past, but a legacy remained in continuing close human/Packrat cooperation. The two species got along well together: if Packrats had been bred for specialized functions, humans were almost infinitely adaptable. Besides, humans could fly and were almost unkillable, which made them wonderful allies. Man and Packrat would probably end up running the Universe as a joint partnership.

Where that left a lonely, earthbound teenager with no friends of his own kind was another matter. When Turner left, Wolf fell back on reading a great deal and taking long walks by himself. Mr. Fletcher was amazed at the number of custom-made, hard-soled shoes his son wore out. Later on, Wolf took up running, thinking it somehow approximated the feeling of flying; years later he was to discover it didn't, but in the meantime the regular exercise developed his body in ways that were almost unique in his era.

He was running along an access road between cornfields, used mainly by automated farm equipment — he was 16 then, stripped to the waist on a hot summer day, and tanned. Taking it easy and breathing easily, Wolf was getting a little tired but reluctant to stop: he was starting to feel what had once been described as a runner's high. As he ran, a group of giggling girls about his own age flew overhead. He recognized them as girls he knew from various of his classes and tried to ignore them. It wasn't that he had no feelings toward the opposite sex — quite the contrary — but after the few girls he'd tried to be friendly to had reacted with obvious shock and revulsion, he had realized yet again that he simply lived in a different world from everyone else's.

One of the girls detached herself from the formation and flew down alongside Wolf as he ran. Her name was Signy Dargaud: Wolf had not tried to make friends with her earlier, having realized his limitations before he got to her, but he had talked to her on occasion. Wolf tried not to look at her while she watched him run, fearing embarassment, ridicule, and worse. She seemed fascinated by the play of muscles in Wolf's bare legs as they rhythmically pumped up and down, feet slamming into the ground and lifting again in continious cycle, propelling him forward. For Signy and nearly everyone else on earth, legs were all but useless, serving at best as rudders; she seemed surprised to realize they had a purpose. Then she watched the strain and release of the muscles in Wolf's chest and abdomen for a while. Women of another age might have been favorably impressed by the display of raw, primordial power, but at length Signy, who lived in an age when people moved with the subtle grace of a fish in water or a snake gliding in the grass, only shook her head and said, "You're gross!" and flew back to rejoin her friends.

Later, in another incident just after class had let out one

day and he and Signy chanced to be alone on a balcony, she gave him a fleeting kiss and flew off. Wolf went around in a happy warm daze for some time, thinking his isolation was finally coming to an end, until he found out she had done it on a bet. He was still the odd man out, still the freak.

Fortunately for his peace of mind, he was contacted about that time by a group called the Rhea Foundation, a new organization formed to promote the interests of "ostriches" like him. There had been other such groups before, but groundlings were so rare and so widely scattered that none had ever come to anything. The Rhea Foundation, however, had the advantage of an energetic leadership and looked like it might endure, so Wolf joined. One of his first activities was a summer camp for young members. It was a revelation to be among others of his own kind for the first time in his life; just being able to sit around and complain about how cruel and inconsiderate flying people were, and getting a sympathetic response from friends who knew exactly what he was talking about, made it worth the trip. But more than that, he met girls who didn't laugh at him because he didn't fly, who understood him, who appreciated him for being what he was and didn't scorn him for not being something else . . .

It took some getting used to. Since many of the flightless girls had problems of their own, relationships weren't always smooth and there were numerous rough spots along the way, but he had few regrets.

The Rhea Foundation became a way of life. He still had to get along in the outside world for his education and day-to-day activities, but his social life was entirely within the Foundation. After a lifetime of isolation and keeping

his own counsel, he discovered he was naturally gregarious and liked to be with people — his own kind of people. His fellow Rheans liked him, and even while quite young he began taking on positions of responsibility within the organization. He did his work well and conscientiously, and proved to have a knack for ruffling the minimum amount of feathers when disagreements among the members came up.

He had known Tanya O'Connor for some time as just another member of the group without anything developing: the thunderbolt struck when he had to work with her on the fundraising committee. After that, they were inseparable. She seemed to understand him better than anyone else ever had, and his kindness and consideration toward her seemed to be just what she needed most after a life of sometimes brutal rejection. Wolf had read somewhere that a few thoughtful philosophers were convinced that the flying web and its defense field had made the human race as a whole more callous, more inconsiderate of other people's feelings precisely because it was now virtually impossible to hurt them physically, and after hearing about Tanya's experiences he could well believe it himself.

Wolf ran into Signy now and then — not often, since she had taken up a singing career and he went to work for an import/export firm that had extensive dealings with the Packrats — but their paths occasionally crossed. She would tease him gently about jogging, then inquire about how he and Tanya were getting along. Wolf always had the feeling Signy thought of him and Tanya the way society women once thought of that pair of midgets whose marriage P. T. Barnum had arranged: they were "cute," a matched set. He would chat pleasantly with Signy for a bit, then one or the other would make the excuse of pressing business or an important appointment, and she would fly away, sometime leaving Wolf wishing he could fly with her. She was flirty and fickle, but her vivacity was a delightful contrast to Tanya's bitterness. But even if Tanya could be depressing at times, she was steadier than Signy, and Wolf felt comfortable with her. She was one of his own kind, after all.

"You ponder overlong," said Turner.

They were no longer alone on the deck: a few couples had drifted out of the ballroom and stood looking out at the stars and moon. It would have been romantic if a group of pre-teen children apparently staying with their parents at the hotel hadn't sailed past overhead and yelled down, "Ostriches!" and spoiled the mood.

"See?" Wolf said. "***They*** don't understand us or have any sympathy. I don't think they can, not by themselves. But I've seen both worlds and maybe I can help. You're a diplomat: you know how important it is to understand both the people you're representing and the people you're representing them to. I got the job I have now because I understood Packrats better than anyone else, thanks to growing up with you. Perhaps I could do the same thing with the . . . 'ostriches.' "

"Perhaps," said Turner. "Or perhaps, now that the flightless bird had taken wing, he should leave the nest behind."

"You certainly are insistent on that point," Wolf muttered. "Sometimes I wonder if you knew all the time what we'd find in that ruin."

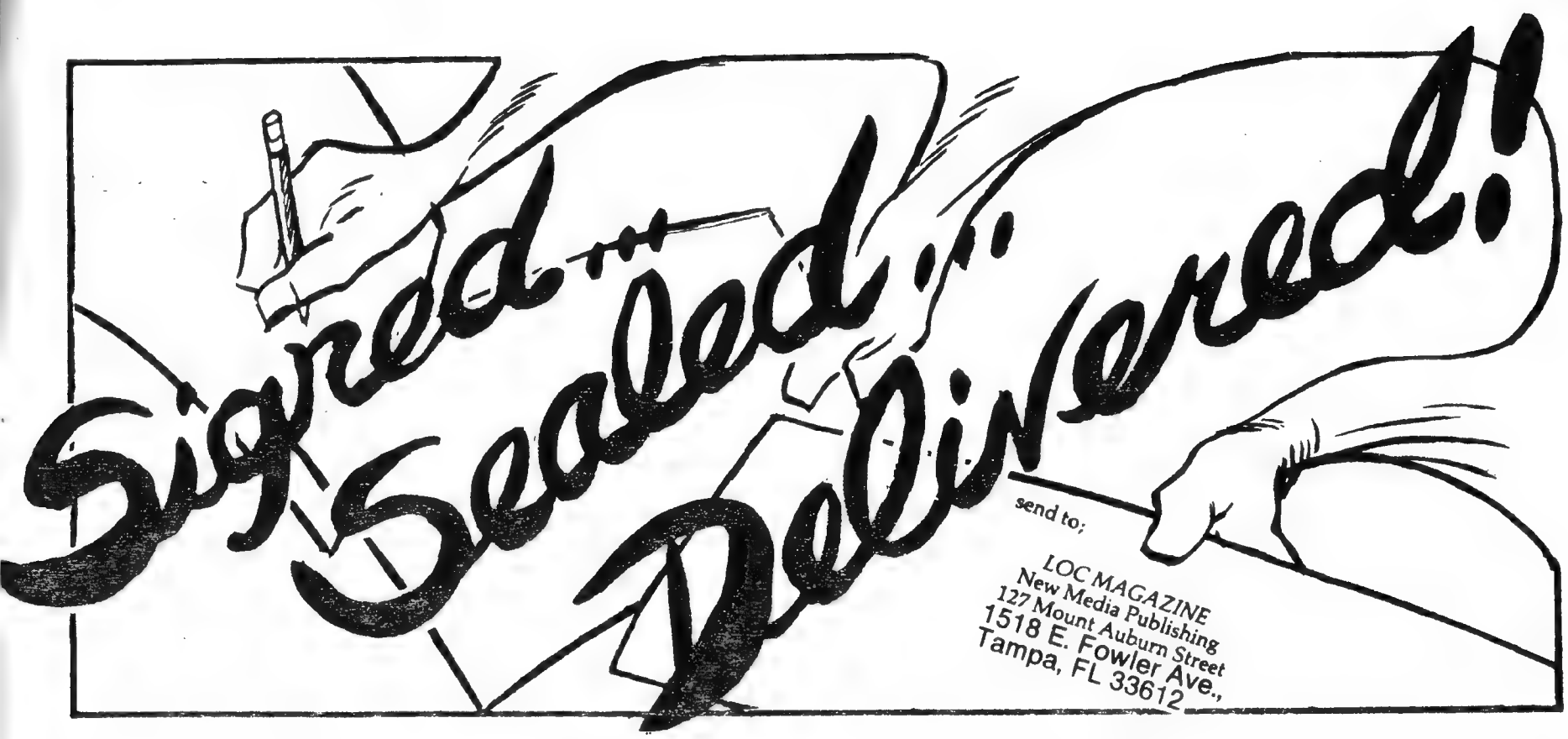
"Had I planned it," Turner replied evenly, "I should have devised an easier way of it for myself. But as it was, I believe I was instrumental in giving you flight, and what better gift could I make to the best friend of my youth?"

Turner had definitely pulled ***some*** strings. As Wolf had grown older, he began to catch up with Turner's maturity again and their correspondence grew more frequent. Both often wrote vaguely of a desire to get together again, but interstellar travel was hardly cheap and they were separated by a vast gulf of light-years. The obvious solution to the problem was to get someone else to pay for the ticket. So it happened that the company for which Wolf worked found itself required to send a representative to one of the periodic conferences held by the Packrat Trade Commission with its alien customers. The fact that Wolf was specifically requested could very well have had something to do with the fact that Turner held a post in the Terran Affairs department of the Packrat Trade Commission.

Even so, it was a great honor for one so young and so handicapped. The Rhea Foundation threw a big Bon Voyage party for Wolf, and Abdul Salazar, among others, started bandying his name about as the logical choice for the organization's next President. There was a later, private, and emotional farewell to Tanya.

Then Wolf went off to Jagannath, the planet selected as the conference site because it spred out the inconvenience of getting there more than Packrat Homeworld would have. Wolf left with his life in good order: he had friends, an extended family, and a woman who loved him. He had his own little world and a place in it. When he came back, he would have very little of that left.

Continued next issue.



Mike Sopp
Erie, PA

You said you wanted letters...

Number three is the first issue of **LOC** that I've seen; hopefully, it'll keep showing up at my usual hangouts. All in all, this is a good magazine you've got here.

Except for the cover. What happened? The art was good, but the cover seemed out of focus. Still, with this only being the third issue, if the cover is the only major problem you have then you cannot be doing all bad.

As for the articles, I've not read all of them, but the ones I have read were very good. It is nice to read the educational in-depth essays without any negativism. [I have nothing against being negative, as long as the reason for the negativism is remembered.]

As for the meat of this letter, I wish to respond to John J. Lewandowski's letter about John Byrne and the FF.

I did not like it when Mr. Byrne took over the writing, pencilling, **and** inking chores on **FANTASTIC FOUR** for a couple reasons. The most important reason [even though I may not always be willing to admit it] is that he took the book over from three of my favorite creative people: Doug Moench, Bill Sinkiewicz, and Joe Sinnott.

The second reason goes hand-in-hand with the first. I doubt if Byrne has realized it, but it is not 1963 any more. Quite a lot has happened since then, both to the members of the FF and to those of us in reality [whatever that is], and there is something about just forgetting about all of it that I don't like. I'm not too sure the audience of today is going to take the simplicity of John Byrne's version of the 1963 FF; I'm not too sure we should, either. [I know; there I go speaking for everyone...] After all that has gone before—the beautiful complexities of work by people like Roy Thomas, John Buscema, and even the later Lee-Kirby work, and the possibilities of Moench and Sinkiewicz, should we go back to the simplicities that Mr. Byrne's statement implies?

I also do not like the possibility of his writing Alicia out of the FF in order to make the Thing more tragic. Doesn't he understand that one of the things that makes the Thing tragic is that he is loved by a beautiful woman and yet he feels he cannot return the love? That and his wisecracking serve to make him a more tragic character than any monstrous devolution could ever make him. Isn't there anything more tragic than someone accepting his state of life?

Something else that I don't like is his writing, pencilling, **and** inking with only Editor Jim Salicrup providing other creative input. It is obvious that Jim Salicrup is a very good editor, and John Byrne is a talented creator, but to leave a book up to two individuals, when something of that sort is best handled by a team of individuals, worries me.

Still, all of this aside, I have enjoyed the work that he has done so far. For pure entertainment, you cannot beat what he is doing. I hate to admit it, but it is good.

As for how he is treating the FF, and whether or not I think he is doing a good job, well, that will have to wait for a while. I really do not know.

Talking about how writing and art work together in comics is one of my favorite pastimes, so, even though I've not read the article that started the debate between the editor and Howard Leroy Davis, I'd like to throw my two cents in by saying that writing and art should work together hand in hand to produce something that is greater than what could

have been produced individually. Any series where one shines over the other usually means the series is inferior. John Byrne's art on the **X-MEN** would have been nothing without Chris Claremont's writing.

Gary Dunaier doesn't like the year of publication not appearing on the book's covers. I think annuals should be worked into the continuity of the books. I mean, I like to put my Marvels in order of continuity, but it is hard to do with no insert saying where the book fits in. [Still, I guess that is part of the fun of it.]

One question before I sign off: quite a while ago, I heard that NMP was going to publish a fan art showcase fanzine. Whatever happened to it? I'm a writer [hopeful] but I know plenty of artists who would be interested in doing something for it.

Mike Mettler
Clifton Forge, VA

LOC #4 surpasses any praise I could give it, so I will dispense with any. I eagerly await every issue for insight on the kinds of articles I want to read instead of the usual interview and character histories and indices.

Right now, I would like to direct my comments to Mark Evanier. I will vocalize praise here: Bravo! A round of applause! Take a bow, Mark; your ten-page essay on fandom was exactly what I wanted to hear about it—and then some. First of all, it took longer to read than it does to listen to a side of early- to mid-1970s Yes albums [I love the way Mark uses similes and metaphors like that!]. Back to being serious...

For a while now, I had been writing notes on what I though a fan should be... who the investors are... why I am fed up with why who was fired from what company... what new and interesting insults I could use on enemies I know that I took from letter columns... and related topics, but I don't need to any more. Mr. Evanier has formed and captured my opinions to a T. Exactly. Every other paragraph, I found myself jumping up and down, agreeing wholeheartedly, and exclaiming, "Yeah! We know who our dealers are!" along with other indecipherable utterings.

I can relate to Mark's feeling like a bothersome kid when Tuesday and Thursday rolled around at the drugstore. I was like that back in Pittsburgh... and more. I was a little more upfront about my comics; I can remember a time when I specifically asked the vulture perched on a chair behind the counter when today's new comics would arrive. With a grunt, he said, "In an hour." So I took a walk around the block five or six times and came back within a half-hour instead. To my delight, the comics were out on the rack. No questions asked, I purchased my gems and went home contented.

Now, years later, as I had to move to that home-away-from-Mephisto's-home, Clifton Forge, Virginia [temporarily, thank God! Chicago, here I come!], I feel a bit embarrassed and alone being one of the only people for miles around with more than a fleeting interest in comics. The only person that comes to mind who is anywhere near me is about 50 miles away—Ed Via.

The only way I can communicate with fellow fans is through the fanzines. I like to write my own articles., letters and what have you. Communication! [In pittsburgh, I had a friend who lived up the street from me, also having an interest in comics. Once a month we would go downtown to our favorite comics shops to purchase early and recent masterpieces. When I returned to Pittsburgh this Summer, I found his interest had waned; he persuaded me to take his **THOR** collection off his hands.

The only comics-related material he reads today is **THE COMICS JOURNAL**.]

In any article that I write, I try not to put any "Made-up" facts or unjustified comments without good reason, usually not at all. Of course, with hardly any easily accessible sources of "inside insights" from the writers' or artists' points of view, I have to rely on fanzines for any other information besides my own opinion or the subject being discussed itself. As long as I feel the facts are pertinent, I may use them. I may not.

Returning to Mark's essay, it struck chords I did not think could be reached. I am looking forward to his comments next issue.

Quick analysis of other articles: the **MUTANTS/ X-MEN** comparison, **"God and Man in Comics," "Classics or Clunkers?"**, the interview and the letter column were all highlights. I will wait until further installments until I am ready to judge the strips. First reactions: **"Captain Heroic** I like; **"Spanky,"** I did not like.

Overall, the package and format are great. I'd like to wish you luck, but you probably won't need it.

James McBride
Trenton, NJ

LOC #4 was my first exposure to your new publication and by far the best comics-oriented mag to date. It is the first one I have read, with genuine interest, from cover to cover. **"The Origin of the X-Men"** is the kind of discovery-sharing among fans I would like to see more of. I've been looking for a copy of **MUTANT** ever since. **"God and Man in Comics"** was very enlightening. I have been considering writing an article along the same lines myself, so I was glad to come across this article.

Mark Evanier's **"What It Was Was Fandom"** touched on what has been my pet peeve with comics for a long time. I am referring to the specialty shop comics dealers and their pricing of comic books. I have always believed [like Mark] that among these people there has been no reasonable or sound method to determine a comic's worth. Pricing has always been the result of hear-say and greed.

As Mark suggests, supply and demand are almost never taken into account [except when the dealer is buying from you]. Only condition and age seem to have anything to do with a dealer's pricing, but not even that is guaranteed.

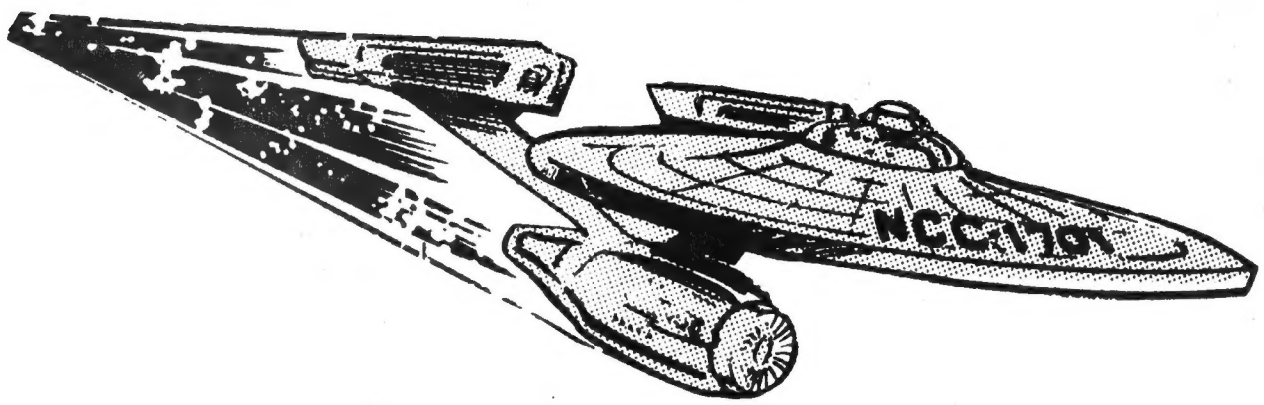
Once, when I came across a dealer who had tables set up in a mall, I was astounded at some of the prices he was asking for titles I had not been in contact with for a while. When I inquired about them, asking if they were hard to come by, he told me they were relatively easy to find. This left me still wondering—why the high price, then?

Although I feel that specialty shops can be a positive force in fandom, I have yet to see an example of this. I grow weary of the unsympathetic, inept, and often rude dealers who run them.

Between the continually rising prices of current newsstand comics and the exorbitant prices being asked for back issues, I don't see how collectors who are just starting out or others, like myself, who are starting all over again can afford this hobby! What was once a cheap form of entertainment for the poor and lower middle classes has, over the last five years, moved out of their grasp. There seems to be no happy solution to this self-perpetuating problem. I have cut corners in my collection in every way I can, but still keep reaching dead ends eventually.

Someone should write an investigative report into comics dealerships, comics mail order houses, and their pricing, with suggestions and tips for those of us who fit into Mark's "reader" category.

Thanks again for a thought-provking magazine.



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EI also covers the world of fan fiction and it examines not only the trends in this sub-genre and reviews the best work available, but it also presents its own ST fiction to help fill the demand by fans who feel cheated by the juvenilia published by Bantam Books. In fact, *EI #9* has an exhaustive article reviewing all of the Bantam Star Trek novels and we pull no punches in our critical study of these less than talented exercises.

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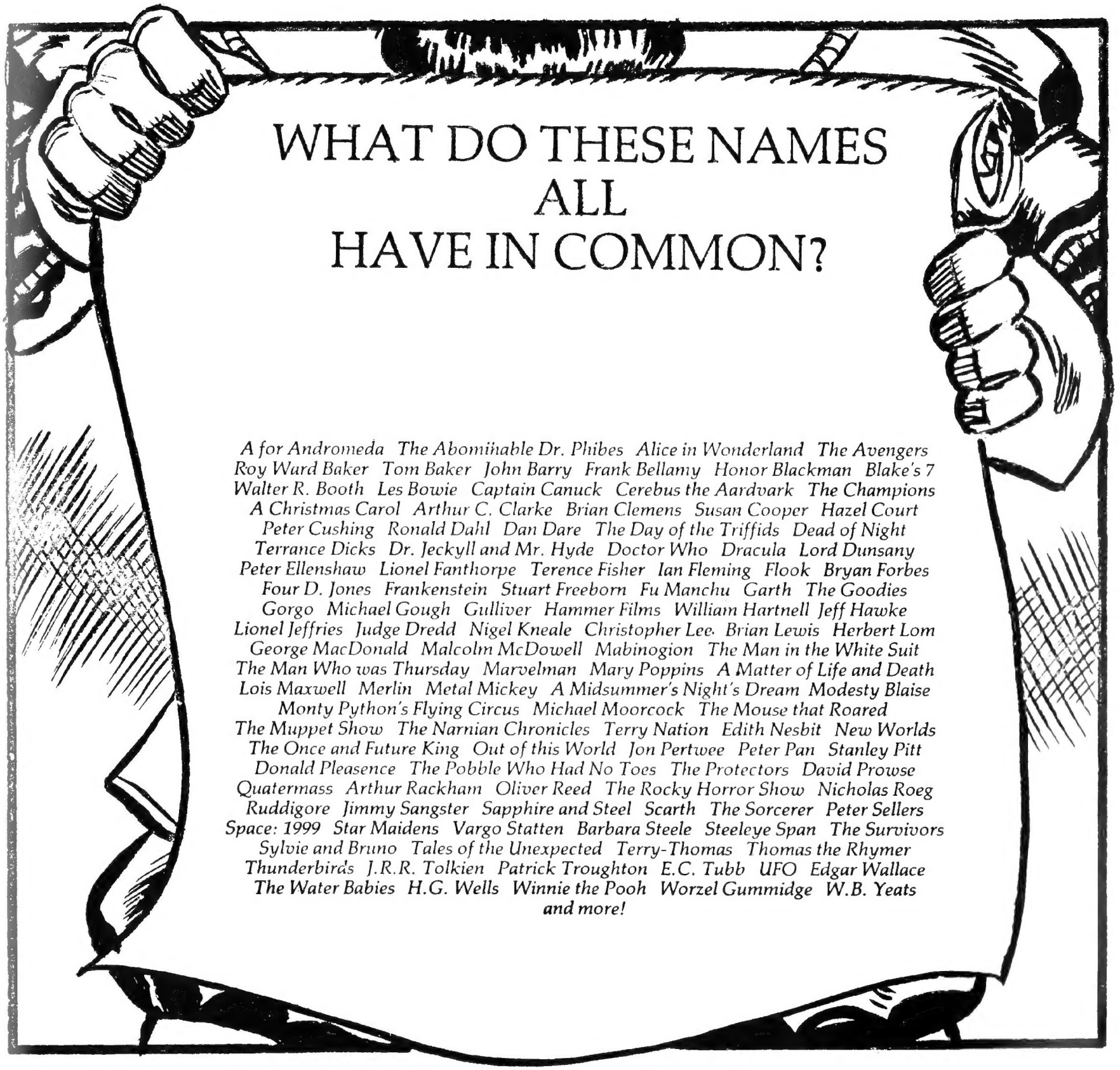

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